

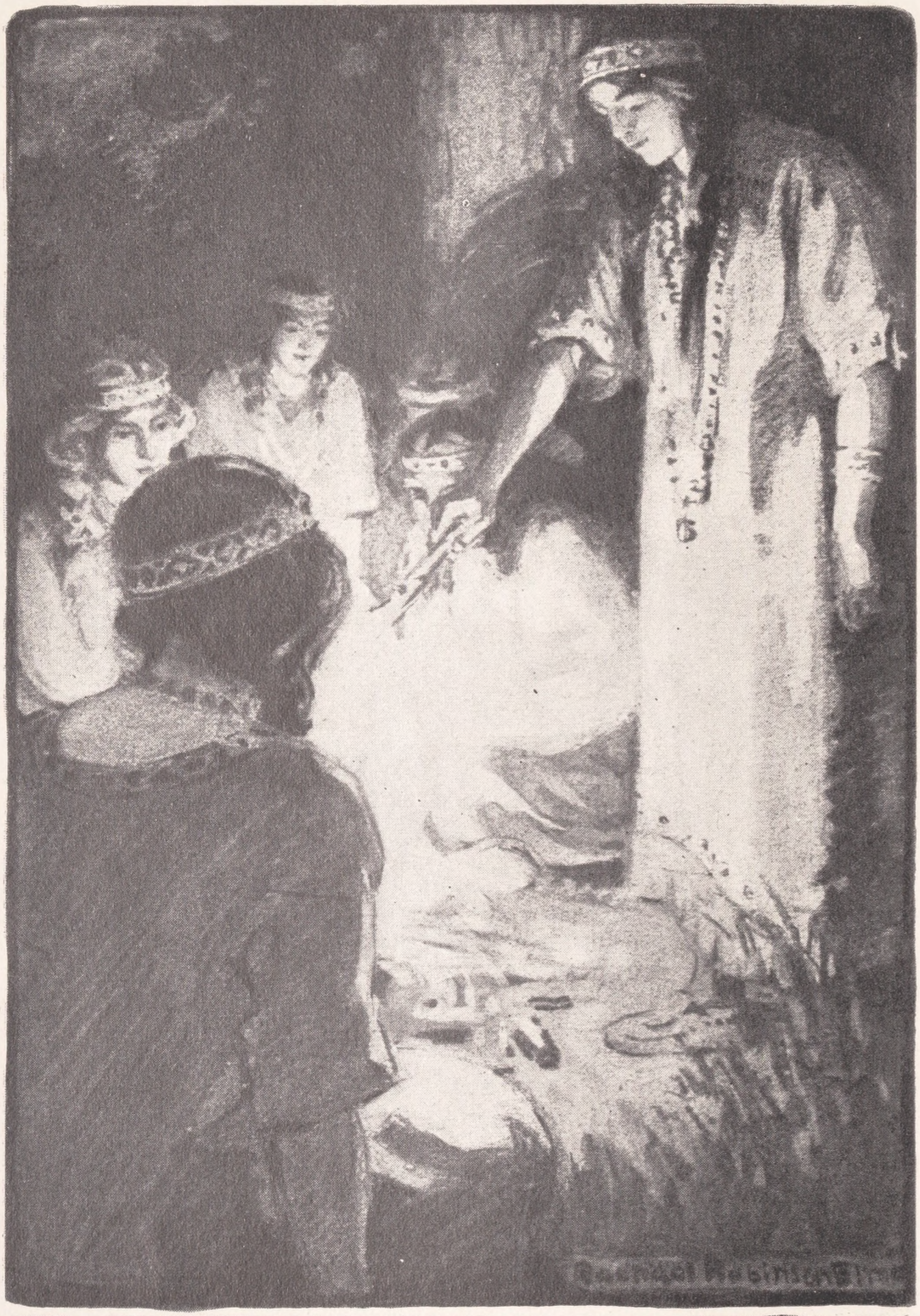
CAMP BRAVE PINE

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK



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THE LIGHT WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME WHISPERED MARGARET I DESIRE TO PASS UNDIMMED TO OTHERS

CAMP BRAVE PINE

A CAMP FIRE GIRL STORY

BY

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

AUTHOR OF "JOYCE OF THE NORTH WOODS," "JANET OF THE DUNES," "A LITTLE DUSKY HERO," "MEG AND THE OTHERS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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DEDICATED

TO

ALL THE DEAR CAMPFIRE GIRLS
OF AMERICA

WITH THE SINCEREST APPRECIATION AND BEST WISHES. AND TO THE GROUP OF GIRLS AT POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK, I GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE ASSISTANCE AND LOVING HELP THEY HAVE GIVEN

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CAMP BRAVE PINE

CHAPTER I

HOW IT CAME ABOUT

"I THINK," said pretty Miss Rose Fay, "that we must be very democratic and set a good example. We must be broad and have the rich and the poor; the good and them who are not *so* good but who are going to be; the bright; the dull, and indeed any who need, whether they know it or not, just this sort of thing."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed Margaret Lee, nodding her fine head emphatically, "but the trouble is that everything is so mixed. Now there is Sylvia Dean with all her money—she's about the poorest girl I know; and on the other hand Jane Trevor, with what you might say nothing, is one of the richest. Joy Deering is the most depressed girl I know for all her sunny name, and Nancy Mowbray the most frivolous."

Miss Rose smiled delightedly.

"I have an idea!" she cried; "we can have this a sort of masquerade camp; we can take people at their face value reversed and treat them accordingly. It will add to the fun."

Margaret thought for a moment and then saw the point.

"That's great!" she said, clapping her hands. "Fancy Sylvia posing as the poorest girl and Jane as the richest, Joy as the Harlequin and Nancy as Miss Sober Sides! Why, it is deliriously comical. And pray, what can I be? I've never had time to think about myself—how I impress others and the like. How do I seem to you, dear Miss Rose?"

There was honest inquiry on the clear, fine face of the young girl; a waiting look as if for the first time in her busy life she had paused to take a glance in a mirror—a mirror that would faithfully reflect her inner self. Miss Rose smiled but did not speak, and Margaret shook her finger at her.

"Now, we'll put it another way," she said; "just what character shall I assume in our plan?"

"You are a sly boots!" Miss Rose cried and

took Margaret by the shoulders and looked deep into the kind eyes; "I should suggest that you be extremely selfish," she went on slowly, "thinking only of yourself, forgetting the calls upon your sympathy and time. It would be a tremendously difficult rôle for you to play, my dear, and I'm sure we should always be discovering you in your disguise; but I am speaking of opposites, you know."

Margaret's face flushed sweetly.

"It's very strange," she replied, "how our best friends never really know us. Only this morning I was thinking how selfish and self-centered I am growing. Now this plan of ours has pushed every other interest aside. I refused to read to my small sister last evening and actually suggested that she should do the family darning, and that is my particular job, as you know."

It was a lovely June day that Margaret Lee and Miss Rose Fay held this conversation in Miss Rose's tiny bachelor apartments on a quiet side street on the west side of New York City. Miss Rose was a well-beloved kindergarten teacher on the east side of town, but this was Saturday and plans for a summer vacation were being considered.

"It must be cheap—" Miss Rose had said when the subject of vacation was thought of.

"Neat—not gaudy," Margaret Lee had returned.

"Restful and exciting," Miss Rose put in.

"Necessary and superfluous!" added Margaret, and then they both laughed merrily.

And so on this June Saturday morning the two had met and discussed ways and means. "There's the old farmhouse in New Hampshire," Miss Rose began after personalities had been disposed of; "I know it has a roof and a fireplace; I'm not sure of anything else. There are bits of furniture, too, but how much I cannot say."

"And what more could any one want?" asked Margaret. "Give me a roof to cover my head, a fire to cheer my soul and—the world is mine! Ours! Everybody's!"

"The house is a quarter of a mile from the highway."

"All the better for exercise," nodded Margaret.

"It's on a hill and there are tall elms near by!"

"Heavenly!"

"And a lonely pine, if I remember aright."

"Glorious!"

"I can recall how the moon looks through the branches." The little schoolmistress's eyes grew misty.

"You poor, tired dear," comforted Margaret; "how soon can we get away?"

"By July first, I am sure."

"Good! And now what other luxuries has the blessed spot?"

"Well, there was an old outhouse. My grandfather used the lower room for a carpenter shop; there was a loft overhead and in that was stored all the discarded household furniture. I dare say there is some there yet which might be utilized."

"Oh! how fascinating;" Margaret's practical face was beaming; "making perfectly good things out of rubbish is my one shining talent."

"And right near the pine tree which stands in front of the house," Miss Rose went on, "is a tiny rustic arbor overlooking the meadows and the village. There used to be seats running around three sides of it and a dear bumpetty table in the middle which

could be utilized for picnicking if one did not object to humps."

"This is too much!" Margaret exclaimed, clapping her hands with delight. "I see us gathered there morning, noon, and night."

"And there is a well," Miss Rose continued; "not a plain well, mind you, but a deep, dark place in whose depths, they say, you can see the stars at midday—providing the top is taken off the wellhouse. The water in that well has magic power. You forget weariness and heat. —you just grow to be your best self after drinking it a few days."

"What is this date?" Margaret asked, springing up and reaching for a calendar. "June 11th, and we must wait until July 1st. How can we, Miss Rose? But—" the girl paused and gave a comical grimace; "how about grub? I hate to mention it, but you know how hungry girls will get in the country."

"Vegetables can be had in plenty near at hand. Milk, too—real milk, I mean, and cream that stands alone, and eggs that the hens deliver at your door themselves, to prove the freshness."

"Of the hens?" Margaret suggested with her merry laugh—"they are evidently poor business hens."

"Well, they're reliable and philanthropic," said Miss Rose. "Meat—we cannot rely upon."

"Who cares for meat in Paradise?" Margaret tossed her head. "And now about furniture?"

"That's the rub;" Miss Rose looked thoughtful. "I know there are some odds and ends, but what they are I do not know. There are no beds, I am sure, but of one thing I am confident, there are plenty of boxes and pieces of wood to make tables and dressing stands, and the rest, with old trees and bushes, will supply us with fuel."

"Great! And now I have a plan. May I use your telephone?" Miss Rose nodded. "We'll begin on Sylvia." A moment later from the inner room Miss Rose heard varied but one-sided conversations.

"Riverside 6329-L calling. Is that you Sylvia? What are you doing? Just getting up! You drone. It's half-past ten A. M. Well, you shouldn't stay up so late, Senior

Prom, or no Senior Prom. What are your plans for the summer? Europe or the Canadian Rockies? Well, child, you're going to do neither. They would bore you to death. You've done them several times before, and you so young! I must hurry. Get up and come down to Miss Rose's in a half-hour! Look sharp. You're going to New Hampshire for the summer. Camp, poverty, and fun. Good-by."

The receiver was hung up. Another click!

"Chelsea 3920 W. L. calling.

"That you, Jane? Every one is in, this morning. It's great luck. Day off? That's splendid. What are you doing? Making over a skirt? Bring it down to Miss Rose's. Be here at eleven. We'll all pitch in and help and incidentally tell you where you're going to spend your month's vacation. In town? Not a bit of it. You're going to a better place. Hustle, girlie, and bring the skirt along."

Another click.

"Oh! That's you, Joy. What's happened? Nothing? Well, come to Miss Rose's. Something is happening here. Be

here at eleven, sharp. We want you to cheer us up. By-by!"

Click!

"Yes. Nancy *is* in! Oh! that giggle! Nothing specially funny? Only things in general? Well, come as soon as you can to Miss Rose's. You'll certainly have a pain in your side when you hear what we have to tell you. Come right along. Wear your calmest costume or you'll overdo the situation. You'll have to hurry!"

A final click and Margaret emerged from the inner room flushed and laughing.

"I put the nickels in the box, Miss Rose," she said; "just suppose we lived in the days of stage-coaches! It would have taken a week to get them here. We may have lost some of our polish, but we certainly have gained speed."

Miss Rose was putting her small sitting-room in order and dusting where no dust was. The soft air floated into the broad window and bore on its breath the scent of roses and lovely early summer flowers, for the wind was from the west and a rich man's garden two blocks away was doing its sunniest best to share with the world its wealth of fragrance.

"That garden," said Miss Rose, sniffing, "has kept me in this flat. If the landlord realized it, he'd put up the rent. There! Meg, dear, we are ready for the meeting. I declare! Isn't that an automobile?" She ran to the window. "It is. It's Sylvia!" And presently Sylvia entered the room, panting a bit from the unusual effort of coming up two flights of stairs on her own feet. She was a very pretty girl, beautifully gowned and with an expression in her young eyes of boredom and weariness. She sank into the easiest chair in the room and threw a kiss to Miss Rose and Margaret.

"I haven't taken a good breath since you haled me out of bed, Meg," she panted. "You're the first one who has made me curious in years and years! Every one else says and does exactly what you know they will do. Isn't Meg inspiring, Miss Rose?"

"Yes, she is." Miss Rose smiled at Margaret.

"If any one had to lose her money and come up against trials," Sylvia rattled on, now that she had recovered her breath, "it ought to be Meg; she does it so artistically. You must

come abroad with me this summer, honey. It just popped into my head when you telephoned. To go without some incentive would be absolutely dreary, but to see you bubble through Europe would be a revelation. Will you come, Meg? Grandfather will—not matronize us, but patronize us! He said he'd give me what I wanted this summer for a birthday gift. Will you come?"

"Sylvia, you embarrass me! I cannot accept your offer—" Margaret knew it was given in the airiest way and had no deeper foundation than the girl's lazy good nature; "but we must spend the summer together."

"I thought that was a joke." Sylvia threw aside her white automobile coat and loosened her pretty little bonnet. She did not take it off, for she knew too well how becoming it was. Her dainty pink and white face was surrounded with fluffy golden curls; her baby eyes were blue and inquiring—she looked like a doll and posed continually.

"It's no joke," said Margaret, seating herself beside Miss Rose in the window seat; "wait until the others come! There are just enough chairs, and the footstool for an over-

flow. There's some one coming up the stairs like a house afire. Of course it's—Nancy!"

And into the room burst a large, handsome girl, her brown eyes dancing, the dimples breaking the red of her cheeks like cunning nooks, and her even, strong white teeth showing.

"Good morning, *everybody!*" she cried, flinging herself into a chair and taking off her red geranium hat to fan herself with. "Whew! But it's hot in the sun. I just plunged down here! I'm dying with curiosity. Dear Miss Rose, how sweet and cool you look; and Sylvia —you're stunning!"

"Any remarks about me, Nan?" Margaret raised her eyebrows. "Any compliment coming this way?"

"Oh! You're Meg. What's the use of throwing away words on you? Isn't she a dear, Sylvia?"

"She certainly is." Sylvia's flow of spirits was checked by Nancy's more strenuous one, and Sylvia always resented taking a side place.

"First in the schoolroom, first in her home, first in the hearts of her countrywomen!" Nancy tossed her giddy hat on the table and

smoothed out her white flannel skirt. "Who else is coming?"

"By the step upon the stair, by the sigh upon the air," Margaret rose from her seat, "I think our Joy is upon us!" And sure enough Joy Deering came languidly into the room. The door was ajar and she slipped through the opening like a little shadow. She was a mouse of a girl, slight, fair, and gray-eyed. She wore a suit of gray rajah silk, a gray chip hat with gray feathers, and her slim hands and arms were encased in gray suede gloves. Upon the pale girlish face an expression almost peevish rested continually. The delicate mouth was drooping, the fine nose a trifle sharp, and her voice, when she talked, was pathetically appealing. With everything in the world to make her happy,—"even her name," as Nancy once said, Joy Deering was a depressing little creature.

"There's a real chill in the air," she said in her drawling voice. "I'll move this chair out of the draught, dear Miss Rose, if you do not mind. It's so miserable to have it cold in the shade and hot in the sun. How-do, girls!" Joy said this in the saddest kind of a voice.

"Gracious!" Nancy broke in, fairly crowding out of the window the impression Joy was making, "you need exercise, child, and scraped beef and hot milk every ten minutes. You look—" she flung her handsome head back and laughed. "You look anæmic! I tell you, girls, I'm studying types. Extreme youth keeps me from literature, but in another year I enter the fray. I'm not saying much, but I expect to do big things if only I can keep out of college and preserve my style!" Nancy made a comical face that set everybody to laughing.

"You're a terribly abused person," said Miss Rose, shaking her finger at Nancy. "Think of struggling to keep out of college!"

"And here comes gentle Jane!" Margaret cried, but the laugh had gone from her voice. How she longed for what Nancy was struggling against!

"Last but not least!" Miss Rose went forward to greet the newcomer and take the bundle from her hands. "Dear little Jane!" And perhaps that described her best of all. She was "my dear" to every older person that knew her; even the stern Judge Conly, whose

stenographer she was, had difficulty in restraining his grandfatherly instincts toward her. He always wanted to give her twenty-five dollars a week instead of fifteen, and he was always insisting upon holidays. She was a "dear" and "dearie" to every girl friend she had, and a "peach" and "chum" to her boy friends; and every one acquainted with the American language of youth knows all those terms are synonymous.

"Howdy!" nodded Jane sweetly to the little group; "how nice you all look, and *what* a day! Just perfect. Give me my work, Meg, dear. I had to come, but I must finish my pique skirt for to-morrow. I bought a love of a waist at Thorn's for $1.98—quite a bargain, and a duck of a hat for $1.50. This skirt, when finished, will have cost me $1.35, and to-morrow Tod Nilson is going to take me to see those new pictures up at the Met. His mother is going to meet us there and take us for tea to a dream of a place in the suburbs."

Jane settled herself on the footstool and attacked her work at once. Sylvia Dean looked at her with a frown on her face. Jane upset all Sylvia's calculations. Jane got without

any effort, whatever should by rights, she argued, belong to her. Now this very Tod Nilson! She had danced with him twice the evening before, and he talked of nothing but—Jane Trevor! And what was Jane, to be sure? Just a quiet, happy girl doing her life work without a grumble. A girl with a plain little face but wonderful brown eyes and a mass of reddish gold hair. A girl who never mentioned that her father had once been rich, but who applied herself, since leaving school, to helping her widowed mother keep the modest apartment up town and an interest in life which held only hard work and—little Jane!

"And now," said Miss Rose, tapping on the window seat, "I call this meeting to order and appoint Margaret chairman."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Nancy, waving her hand. "Get busy, Meg, and take us into your confidence." Margaret took her stand by Miss Rose and said:

"Well, then—it's about our vacations. We must spend them together! We need each other. Do you remember that week, girls, during the last year of school, when Sylvia's grandmother had us all at her farm? Wasn't

it splendid? And what fun we had. There have been changes in the last year or two," the young faces clouded. "There isn't any grandmother for Sylvia, and the beautiful farm is sold. There isn't as much money for me and there's more work for Jane, but we all want a vacation and we want it together if we can, don't we now?"

The others had not thought of it before, but as Margaret spoke the idea loomed forth as a thing that must materialize.

"We do!" they cried, to a girl.

"Well, then, hear our plan. Miss Rose will go with us—for *us* to take care of!" Jane Trevor snipped her thread and glanced up. "She has a bit of a farm in New Hampshire," Meg ran on, "a house on a hill—a shed full of shavings and sweet smells and—an arbor, girls! An arbor overlooking wide fields full of—of things and flowers!"

"Oh!" came in several keys.

"That's where we are going on the first of July! Each girl must take her bed and bedding!"

"Good lands!" Nancy broke in. "It sounds as if we were lepers."

Margaret frowned at her. "Yes, we've got to take our beds, cots, hammocks what you will —after that the rest is easy. And, girls we are going to be—I've saved this for the last—Camp Fire Girls! We're going to have a model camp; be an inspiration to all other campers and an honor to ourselves. Miss Rose has qualified for Guardian—who follows on?"

Sylvia leaned forward in her chair, Jane dropped her needle, and Joy and Nancy simply stared.

"I—I—thought," gasped Sylvia at length, "that this—this movement was sort of a—a rowdy thing. I do not know much about it, but I formed that opinion."

"Quite a wrong one!" Miss Rose spoke up. "It is a splendid movement and our camp is going to help prove it. I want *you* all to help me."

"I'm afraid mother—" began Joy Deering.

"Oh, I've seen your mother," Miss Rose broke in, "and your grandfather, Sylvia, and Jane's employer, and Nancy's parents. They are all enthusiastic. It is up to you, girls."

There was a pause—a moment of deep thought.

"Don't you have to wear queer clothes?" asked Sylvia.

"The duckiest kind of duck!" Jane fairly exploded now that the truth had reached her consciousness. "All free and easy and sensible. Besides, they're not glued to you. You can take them off and be frivolous if you want to, Sylvia."

"Oh! I feel my legs twitching to be free already," cried Nancy. "Just fancy! I've seen the suits; they are perfectly fascinating, and we'll give our common sense a chance to grow. I call this plan—supreme!"

A ripple of excitement was growing.

"I wouldn't mind trying it," Joy Deering said in her faint voice. "I'm dying to be with you all. That part would be so jolly, and goodness knows I need cheering—but that khaki color is so fearfully trying and if any one *should* see us—and besides, I'm afraid at night, in the country with only—women and girls."

"I mean to have a man on the place," Miss Rose explained. "Uncle Silas, he's called. I knew him when I was a girl. A great, strong fellow he is. A handy man and a perfect pro-

tector. He's better than the whole police force put together."

"I think," unconsciously Sylvia was begging for favor in this new scheme that she could see was taking ground, "I think grandfather would let us have one of his autos."

"My dear child," Miss Rose exclaimed; "it couldn't be got within half a mile of the house. The roads are abominable. We'll have to depend on Shank's mare and a chance horse belonging to the neighbors. But there is something else. Perhaps you cannot all belong to the camp; there are certain qualifications, but if any one fails there is time to make good the deficiency."

With that, Miss Rose drew from her pocket a printed circular.

"Here are some requirements," she said, and read along rapidly: "you must know how to mend stockings, hem a dish towel, keep accounts, tie a square knot five times in succession, sleep with windows open, or out-of-doors, exercise at least half an hour every day, be able to keep from eating candy or drinking soda between meals, to know the very first aids to people who have been burned, nearly drowned,

etc., etc., and oh! several things more, such as to know certain things about a girl's own self; commit to memory a song or poem; know all about some woman who has done something for her country; know and be able to sing 'My country, 'tis of Thee.' " Miss Rose looked up and there was a twinkle in her kind eyes. Every young face was turned toward her with enthusiasm and excitement; every face but Sylvia's, and hers was almost tragic.

"I—I cannot belong," she whispered forlornly. Now that she seemed an outcast she longed to do that for which she was unfitted. "I cannot do *one* of those things, I'm afraid." Never before had Sylvia, rich and petted, felt at a disadvantage. Among the many requirements for membership in this strange and alluring society she groped for one that she could proclaim herself proficient in, and at last she said weakly, "unless it is—sleeping with my windows open."

At this a general laugh rang out.

"Dear me!" It was Jane's pensive voice; "I seem to have graduated in them all before I enter. I might fall down on a song or poem; but no! not even there am I lacking, for I can

sing any number of college songs, and Thackeray's *Little Billee* I know from start to finish. Oh! woe is me for my abundant knowledge."

Nothing could have been funnier than Jane's attempts at high tragedy. She was such a sweet, comfortable little body that her flights at times were most amusing. Again the laugh rang out from the merry company.

"Surely you can darn a stocking, Sylvy?" Margaret asked soothingly.

"Or you know what a girl of your age ought to know about herself," urged Joy, vaguely. They were all trying to brace her up. It was humiliating, but touching.

"You can refrain from candy and sodas *between* meals," Nancy put in, "providing you have plenty *with* meals, eh, Sylvia?"

Again the laugh bubbled forth. Did they not know, to a girl, the ever-ready box of Huyler's on Sylvia's table and her fondness for sodas?

"Well, of course," said Miss Rose at last quite seriously, "every one of you is eligible for wood gatherer, or can be, and now who will help me with my last heart's desire? Who of you will acknowledge me as Guardian and—be my girls?"

This time the "I! I! I!" was spontaneous and joyful.

"Then for details and preparation. Until we start for our camp I want you to meet here once a week. Sunday evening is a good time, and soon all obstacles will be overcome and our summer of summers planned."

Then they had some iced lemonade, and at one o'clock Sylvia's automobile was filled with the happy, laughing little band.

"I declare, it's the jolliest ever!" cried Nancy, waving to Miss Rose in the window as they rolled away.

"It seems like an ancient adventure!" said Jane hugging her finished skirt to her bosom.

"I do hope nothing will happen to us," sighed Joy.

"It surely will!" Margaret replied, settling herself on the least desirable seat in the car. "Something always happens where Nancy is. My mother says if one really wants a breath-taking, delirious experience, just go shopping with Nan."

"I'm quite quivery over it all;" Sylvia's bored look had disappeared; "but I mean to take some nice togs along in case of an emer-

gency. You never can tell what might happen, and I've never been to a place on earth where, sooner or later, you did not need an evening gown."

"I have such a dream of a gown," Joy put in pathetically; "it looks quite like vapor with rose-buds breaking through."

Just then a particularly uneven spot in the street bumped them all together.

CHAPTER II

CAMP BRAVE PINE

"Now, folks, just tumble in and find the softest spots you can. I hadn't anything big enough to carry you but this old cart. The straw's clean and the roads are tolerable; besides, the sooner you learn the worst—the better!"

Silas Thomas looked at the little group, his shrewd Yankee eyes beaming humorously. Then he grasped Miss Rose's hand.

"Land! Miss Fay," he exclaimed, "you certainly do favor your great-aunt Patsy Fay. You don't look a bit older than you did ten years ago. Be these here your kildergarten what I've heard so much of?"

The group of girls, who were in the act of "tumbling in," paused to laugh.

"We're worse than that," Nancy Mowbray replied, pulling Joy Deering up into the cart over the wheel; "Miss Rose has brought us up here to reform us."

"What offense?" questioned Silas.

"Repressed individuality. We're going to expand up here and give our personalities time to grow."

"Waal! waal!" Silas ejaculated, mounting to the board seat in front and offering his hand to Miss Rose in order to pull her up. "You set up here with me, Miss Fay; we'll give the natives a good impression of the party." A derisive but appreciative jeer met this, and then the merry load started on its way.

"The trunks and gimcracks came up on the morning train," Silas explained as they rattled on. "I hauled them up this noon, so you'll find things sorter comfortable when you land. Beds enough for a hospital; cook stove and barrels of truck labeled 'Handle with care.' Land's sake, as if they could be handled any other way! The heft of them barrels is something to calculate about. Me and the station agent bust all the buttons off our waistcoats, tugging them barrels to the cart."

Another merry laugh! "They laugh considerable easy," Silas whispered to Miss Rose, "and I've noticed that a laugh like that comes from two causes; either they have to laugh

that'er-way, or they feel called upon to do it."

And just then a quiet fell upon the travelers. The beautiful road ran along the brookside for a mile or two; the village, with its queer little houses and shops, was passed and then came a hilly, rough turn and the going was not so easy.

"I'm like Pat with his one feather," whispered Margaret; "if a little straw is so hard, deliver me from a straw bed!"

Nancy giggled. "I never knew," she said, wincing, "how perfectly constructed the human body is to meet every bump halfway."

"Ouch!" cried Jane, "my hair's falling down."

And again a silence fell.

The late afternoon sun shone through the elm trees by the roadside; the breeze became cooler and cooler, and the quiet grew more intense. Suddenly Sylvia Dean spoke from out the silence:

"Miss Rose, did you think to arrange about a man sleeping somewhere on the place? A big, strong, capable man?"

Silas' shoulders rose and fell in appreciation of this.

"How would I do?" he asked, turning his honest, humorous face to the girls; "I ain't any too young or handsome, but I'm strong as an ox and there ain't any walking scarecrow but what would consider two or three times before running up against a good pliable horse-whip held in these here capable hands of mine. Don't you fret, young ladies, I've fitted up a bunk in the lean-to back of the house and there couldn't come a step up the hill without rousing me from deepest slumber."

"What a comforting man!" sighed Sylvia.

"He's a real character," whispered Jane, and Silas caught the word.

"Now, how did you know that?" he said, turning again to the girls, his face flushing shyly. "A character I be and no mistake! There was a writing lady down to the Corners last season, and she writ a remarkable book, and what do you think? She done me up real spick and span. I'm a character right enough. 'Off the Highroad' she called her work of art. I never could see the p'int of the title, but I don't know as titles count much; it's characters as sells books, and I shouldn't wonder if she sold as many as a hundred of hers—I know

we bought six right in this town. My character was 'The Guardian Angel' and she sort of run me loose from cover to cover. I came in handy to fill up between happenings. I couldn't exactly see that I amounted to much in the tale, but them as fill gaps do something!"

"Indeed, yes!" broke in Miss Rose, "and we'll all read the book."

"I wish she'd left my deformities off," Silas went on; his fame in literature was evidently the greatest joy and glory of his life. "You can't always control warts and high cheekbones in life, but I've always held that in book writing you might just as well improve upon nature. But lands! In 'Off the Highroad' not a wart or raw bone was omitted. If I hadn't liked the writer so much, I'd have sued her for defamation of character."

The girls could stand no more. First Joy Deering emitted a hysterical laugh, and a general scream of laughter followed.

Silas turned to them and winked understandingly, and from that time on they were the best of friends.

"There's the house!" Miss Rose stood up and waved her hand as if in greeting.

"Where? Oh, where?" Then a long "Oh!" was wafted on the breeze. There it stood upon its hilltop; the little gray-shingled house. The roof was mossy and sloping; a pretty porch ran across the front door; and the tiny-paned windows were flashing like jewels as the late sun touched them. There was the well, too, and the tool house; the little arbor and the beautiful pine tree standing guard in front. To the girls, who had been studying the Camp Fire essentials, the brave tree was a welcome and a symbol.

"The pine! the pine!" they cried together.

"It has grown for us; it is our own dear sign," Miss Rose's voice rang out clearly; "this shall be our Camp Brave Pine."

"Splendid!" shouted two or three together.

"Come, Mary Jane!" Silas slapped the old horse with the reins; "the sooner you reach the top the sooner you can turn around and come down again. Git along, Mary Jane!"

In a few minutes the house was reached and the jolly load were upon their feet. A rush was made for inside, and delighted cries rang forth as the girls explored.

"Oh! such a love of a hall—and see the furniture! Why, Miss Rose, it is luxurious."

Nancy pounced upon a rocker and swayed back and forth. "Tidies on the chairs, too. I do declare! If Uncle Silas did this I do not wonder the writer-lady let him ooze from cover to cover of her book. Think of a man with such a sense of beauty."

"Oh! come into the dining room, girls!" It was Joy Deering calling. "Blue china! and real pewter tea things—it's great."

"And the closets!" Jane Trevor's voice came forth muffled. "My! but they smell delicious. Clean is no name for them; they are immaculate."

"And oh!" It was Miss Rose from the living room; "a real, true fire in the fireplace here! It has just started to blaze up. It was waiting to say howdy. How could this have happened just so?"

But no one waited for an answer. A general rush for the open fireplace, and glad cries of delight filled the house.

"So artistic!" bubbled Sylvia, kneeling before the blaze; "the andirons are real antiques, and the logs are the smelly kind that you cannot buy for love or money at home."

"Did you ever try love, Sylvy, dear?" asked

Jane, nestling close to Miss Rose and spreading out her slim little hands.

"Personal allusions are odious!" sniffed Sylvia, tossing her head.

"And now for upstairs!" ordered Miss Rose, "and then preparations for supper. Uncle Silas says we'll find enough in the house to begin on."

The merry party got wedged on the stairs, for every one tried to be first and the stairs were narrow. After much struggling and joking the top was reached, and Miss Rose and Margaret led the others.

There was a square hall from which opened five rooms,—four small one, one large one. More exclamations of delight rang through the house as the girls discovered what had been done for their comfort. The cots and mattresses had been unpacked and set in place; the beds were actually made! Sheets, pillow-cases, and blankets had been taken from a box labeled "bed linen," but over each bed lay an old-fashioned patchwork quilt that none of the party had ever seen before!

"Some wizard's work!" said Miss Rose, her eyes shining, but a bit misty.

"Some enchanting fairy has been here!" added Joy Deering, in her plaintive tones.

"Oh! oh!" Margaret Lee called from the largest room, "this is a western room; just come and see the glory pouring in!"

They all ran to the front of the house and then stood still. The big, square room was all aglow. The two narrow beds with their gaudy quilts, the barrel washstand, the kitchen-table-dressing-stand, and the two old, comfortable rockers were all transformed by the golden light that flooded the place. A quiet fell upon the group, and then Jane Trevor broke forth in a song. Jane had a sweet, thrilling voice, and the song she sang was an old, old lullaby with a tender lilt in it like a prayer.

They were all very quiet for a moment, after the tune died gently away, and then it was practical Margaret who spoke.

"We must cast lots to see about rooms for who's who and which. First, who'll share this large room with Miss Rose? Miss Rose is naturally reluctant to have this luxury thrust upon her, but she insists upon having one of us girls with her." Slips of paper were provided, and it fell to Margaret's lot to share the room.

She flushed prettily, and Nancy Mowbray exclaimed:

"Well, some mighty understanding fairy has taken us in his care. Now come, girls! see how he'll treat us as to the other rooms."

Sylvia got the littlest room in the rear. She gave a shrug, but accepted her fortune with true grace. Jane got the second best, and Nancy and Joy the two others.

"Oh, me!" called Nancy from her corner, "my window opens on an apple tree with small, green balls all over it, and bird-nests in every nook!"

"And mine," cried Joy, "opens to the east. I'm going to get some dark muslin to hang over it, or I'll be awake at sunrise."

"And quite proper, too!" Nancy flung back. "It's Joy for our rising-bell, girls. I can hear her cheerful voice now, trilling to the dawn and urging us from our slothful cots."

Even Joy joined in the laugh that this called forth, for she was an indolent girl and none knew that better than she.

"Oh!" burst in Jane Trevor, "my window looks right into the heart of the woods back of the house. There's a path leading in and into

the deepest shade and my window is facing that. I shall follow the path to-morrow and—" she gave another little sing-y trill—"and find my heart's desire."

Trunks were then attacked, and for a time a muffled confusion reigned. Each girl was trying to find place and space for her belongings. Hooks behind doors provided for the few serviceable gowns and coats, trunk trays had to answer for bureau drawers, but willing hands and happy hearts made the best of things. Sylvia and Joy Deering were the worst sufferers, and realized that in readjustment they had much to learn. They were ashamed to acknowledge how cramped and awkward they felt, while Jane's merry song and Nancy's sharp witticisms broke forth every now and then.

"Put on uniforms!" came the order from Miss Rose, and this caused a new ripple of excitement.

"Do you know," Nancy's clear tones rang out, "these patchwork quilts have got on to my imagination. I shouldn't wonder if every nice comfy ghost who once wore dresses like these patches, walked—no, stalked, around

here nights to see what's going on. I've always wanted to be part of a haunted story and I believe my time has come. Oo-oh!"

"Good heavens!" cried Sylvia from her cranny; "that *is* a cheerful idea. For unadulterated creepiness, Nan, you take the prize. Now as for me," she laughed nervously, "I'm trying to fancy how that man felt in the old tale who was put in a room and the walls and ceiling and floor gradually drew together, squeezing him to death! If I sit on the bed and stretch out my hand, putting on a sleeve, I nearly reach across the hall."

Joy Deering came out of her room. "I declare," she said loftily, "we are getting cheerful. Uncle Silas downstairs may keep humans off the premises, but I'd like to know who's going to protect us up here from such creatures as Sylvia and Nancy. My!" she sniffed daintily, "I'm so bewitched that for a moment I actually thought I smelled food."

"Food!" Every one burst into the hall. Even Miss Rose, in full regalia, rushed from her room, followed by Margaret fastening her band around her head. "Food! Food!"

In amaze they looked into each other's faces and murmured:

"Hot biscuits!"

"Ham and eggs!"

"Ginger bread!"

"Cocoa!"

"Dreams of our starved stomachs!" groaned Nancy.

"Visions of our fevered brains!"

They all looked so tragic and funny in their Indian suits, their young faces blank and wondering, that Miss Rose sat down upon the only chair the hall boasted, and broke into uncontrollable laughter. Then, springing up, she exclaimed:

"What sillies we are! Let us use our common sense and—see for ourselves."

In Indian file they followed Miss Rose down the narrow stairs. As they descended, the odors of delectable food became stronger and stronger.

"Starvation hath made us mad!" whispered Nancy.

"It's taken the same form in us all," returned Jane, patting her palpitating heart tragically.

"Quiet!" commanded Miss Rose, and so they passed through the living room, where the

brisk fire was lighting the dark corners, for the twilight was falling; and so to the dining-room door. There a sight met their eyes that caused them all to stand still. The table was laid with snowy cloth, and the old blue china and pewter. A bowl of exquisite pansies stood in the middle of the table, and the low hanging lamp was lighted. In silence they all took in the pretty, homy scene, and just then the kitchen door opened and two young girls, one bearing a plate of biscuits, the other a platter of ham and eggs, entered.

"Land of Goshen!" ejaculated one, gazing in real terror at the group in the doorway.

"Suz sakes!" screamed the other, falling back.

"Heavens!" cried Nancy, rushing forward, "whatever you are, no matter what is the matter, *don't you drop that food!*"

This brought every one to her senses.

"You look just—terrible queer!" the girl who carried the platter explained. "We wasn't expecting—this!"

"I suppose not," and now it was Miss Rose who took command of the situation; "nor did we expect to find this!" She waved her hands

toward the table and the girls themselves. "What a homecoming you have made it. And now, my dears, who are you, and tell me all about it." The steaming dishes were on the table in a jiffy; others were brought in from the kitchen, and explanations were wedged in between trips to and fro.

"I'm Mary Allen," said she of the biscuit plate. "Ma said as how you would remember me, Miss Fay, if I called to your mind the time you took me by the heels and shook the cent out of me what I had swallowed."

"Oh! dear, dear;" Miss Rose's eyes were dancing. "Can this be little Mary Allen?—the human bank we used to call her, she was so fond of swallowing things. Oh! Mary, how old you make me feel. And—"

"Yes'm," nodded she of the golden eggs and brown ham. "I'm Sally Temple. Ma said you taught me my alphabet and had a real hard tussle doing it. It was a good job, though, Miss Fay, for I'm real literary now and Ma says it all came from them first lessons you gave."

Nancy dropped her merry eyes. They were all sitting around the table now and devouring

the delicious food with appetites they had never reckoned with before.

"Oh! you have all been so good!" Miss Rose's eyes were quite dim. "You have remembered so—beautifully."

"Suz sakes!" Sally burst out; "it was real fun. Uncle Silas took the market wagon and went from house to house telling every one you were coming and saying, 'What'll you give an old maid to put in her cottage?' And folks just pressed things on him. It was heaps more fun than a minister's donation; but it was real mean of Uncle Silas to hold forth about you being an old maid, I think." Here Sally paused and took a mental inventory. "I think you'd pass for young anywhere, and in real clothes you'd be right handsome."

Margaret Lee started a jolly cheer, and the room rang with the merry sound.

"Miss Rose,"—it was Sylvia Dean who spoke,—"could I have another egg? I was never so hungry in my life."

"If Sylvia, why not we?" cried Nancy; "count the eggs, Joy. Two apiece and two over. Thank heaven!"

When the meal was finally finished, darkness

had settled gently over the land. The clear stars were shining and the sentinel pine stood grimly guarding the little gray house.

"And now," said Mary Allen with a sigh, "comes the mean part. Clearing away and redding up. You folks rest to-night; me and Sally will fix things and leave you tidy. There's food enough in this house to last you a week. The hanging shelf in the cellar is filled with stuff, and the mice can't reach it. Come on, Sally."

But every Camp Fire girl was on her feet. Even Sylvia caught the fun of the thing.

"We glorify work because through work we are free.
We work to win, to conquer, to be masters.
We work for the joy of the working and because we are free!"

chanted Jane Trevor, piling up plates as she sang.

"Now would you look at that!" Sally Temple stood with her mouth open, staring at the merry girls carrying dishes to the kitchen, perparing the dish water and seizing towels. "Did you ever!"

Mary Allen never had, but she was fascinated. And now the work song was started

and every one joined in, Miss Rose beating time with the glass she was energetically rubbing.

"Good morrow, fair maid, good morrow, I greet you,
I hope in no mood for sorrow I meet you;
There are dishes to do, mending to do, cooking to do,
And something for you, yes, something for you, oh,
plenty for you!
So shake off dull care! Hide that look of despair,
And get busy, get busy, get busy.
Rub-a-dub-a-dub!"

Every girl, doing her part, shouted the chorus.

"Well, of all things!"

Sally dropped on a chair.

"It's the doing of it together!" Mary Allen sagely remarked. "Doing it alone—is deadly."

"All good work is divisible by hearts!" trilled Jane, scrubbing the frying pan gleefully. "And everybody owes a rub, rub, rub!"

"Here, you Mary Allen!" ordered Sally, recovering herself, "let's carry these dishes to the pantry. My! ain't this grand? It's like dancing and romping. Here, sweep up that

hearth while I fetch more wood. 'Everybody owes a rub, rub, rub!' " She had caught the words and tune of the chorus.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CEREMONIAL

"Supper over, now they hasten
To their wigwams, all excitement."

MARY and Sally were gone. They had all walked to the edge of the meadow with them and bade them a hearty good-night, then turned and retraced their steps. It was a beautiful July night, stars shining, cool breeze blowing, and a delicious odor of wild flowers and growing things in the air. The pine tree stood dark and straight over the little house, from whose windows shone the lights of home.

"How peaceful it is!" said Miss Rose tenderly.

"I wish all the dear home folks were here," whispered Margaret with a light sigh. Miss Rose tucked her hand under Margaret's arm.

"You've won your vacation, dearie," she said.

"Miss Rose,"—Nancy turned as she was going on ahead,—"could we, oh! could we have a Council Meeting to-night under the pine?

See the star hanging right over the tree; listen to the sound in the branches. Please, Miss Rose."

"Oh! yes, yes!" came the chorus.

"You are not too tired?"

"No! no! Besides, it is only eight o'clock or a little after."

"It is nearly nine, dearies."

"What's nine when the heart's young?" Nancy ran ahead, gleefully quoting as she fled:

"Toward the forest on they go now!
Form a circle in the darkness;
Call they on the Great Spirit
To help them in their fire-making."

A sweet seriousness grew upon the young faces as quickly and quietly they gathered wood for their first outdoor fire. They cleared a place under the pine tree over which the brilliant star shone, they made safe the spot, with stones and large pieces of wood, and then Miss Rose took her place by the well-laid pile and gazed fondly at her group of girls. They were all qualified as torch bearers, for since the plan was first thought of they had worked and prepared themselves in every way, but it was to Margaret that Miss Rose turned to honor

now by lighting their first fire. There could never be any jealousy of Margaret. She was one of those girls whom all girls and women would always love to honor.

"Margaret, dear, take this torch!"

Miss Rose had lighted it by striking two stones together in really Indian fashion.

"The light which has been given me," whispered Margaret, taking the blazing fagot, "I desire to pass undimmed to others."

The evening breeze seemed to have entered into the spirit of the thing, for it fanned the spark until a bright flash, another and another followed, and the mass was aflame!

The ring of happy faces was touched with red light; the fantastic dress, the shining beads, were all turned, as if by magic, into dancing gleams and shadows.

"And now we must have names," Miss Rose spoke quietly, "and I have asked Nancy to prepare a list appropriating one to each girl, but no one need accept unless she chooses. Nancy, begin."

There were twinkles in Nancy's dark eyes. She was sensing fun and her dimples showed merrily.

"Margaret Lee," called Miss Rose.

"Margaret, I have dubbed the Swift Foot," said Nancy. An irrepressible laugh broke from Jane Trevor, for poor Margaret was slow and sure and swiftness of any sort was foreign to her.

"That's no laughing matter," said Margaret sweetly; "I just love the name, Nan, and I take it with thanks. I'll live up to it too, or tumble in the attempt."

"Bravo!" cried Miss Rose. "And now, Jane Trevor."

"Singing Cricket. Cricky, for short. I've forgotten the Indian name, it was about a mile long, but Singing Cricket is enough." Nancy waited.

"Lovely!" Jane broke forth. "The Cricky is especially appealing. The singing shall be my slogan. Thank you, Nan."

"Sylvia, dear!"

"The Dauntless," promptly Nancy replied.

"Heavens!" Joy Deering broke in. "The Dauntless! Sylvy, can you live up to that?"

Sylvia's face flushed a bit angrily. She knew she was cowardly and timid, but she was sensitive about her shortcomings. However,

she was learning that she was only one of many, and any bid for favor on her part was always cried down among the girls.

"This is too, too much," Jane said with her bright laugh. "Our scary Sylvy, our much chaperoned belle, our Grandfather's idol! Nancy, this is laying it on with a whitewash brush. Denounce her, Sylvy, and by the star above I'll find you a more fitting name."

"Thanks!" Sylvia replied, drawing herself up and smiling determinedly. "I think if Meg can live up to swiftness, I can make a try at bravery. I rather like the hitching myself to that name. Grandfather would be delighted. I'm 'The Dauntless' all right."

"Good for Sylvia!" Miss Rose's face was glowing and happy.

"Joy Deering!"

"I'm going to give Joy the name I picked out for myself," said Nancy; "that is, if she wants it. I found it in an old Indian story. It's dandy. So untrammeled and outsidy." The circle bent closer and every face was eager.

"Wap-o-me-o! It means Happy Bird. Wap for short. Isn't it breezy and significant?"

Jane Trevor rocked from side to side in suppressed mirth as she looked upon Joy's stern, disapproving face.

"Refused!" sighed Nancy. "All right. I'm the Wap."

"No, you're not!" Joy shook her head. "I'm not going to be the first quitter. The Wap—" then of a sudden she broke into laughter. "Nancy, you are too ridiculous. I'll scream every time I hear the word. Wap! Why it's positively deliriously funny. I dare say it will change my whole character. Wap, indeed!" And again her laugh rang out.

"And now," said Nancy, "I am going to name our dear Guardian. Hiatini, Desire of Accomplishment, I salute you! Your desire for us shall come true. We will bring honor upon your head and delight to your heart. We will live up to our names and trample our faults—we adore you, Hiatini!"

For a moment tears struggled with laughter in Miss Rose's eyes. They were so dear and girlish, these children of the Camp Brave Pine. They were so light-hearted and joyous, and she did so want the best for them.

"Thank you, Nancy child," she said at last

softly. "It is a beautiful name, and graciously bestowed. I am desirous of accomplishing many things,—most of all, a happy summer, the best kind of a happy summer. And you, Nancy, what name have you?"

At this the dimples disappeared from Nancy's cheeks and her clear, fun-filled eyes fell.

"Nameless," she faltered. "I dared not name myself. Please let me win my spurs, and when you can all decide upon a name for me—then will I be no longer, Nameless."

"Oh!" came in disappointed chorus, but Miss Rose hushed it.

"That is fine!" she cried; "we'll go slow, Nancy dear, and name you well before long. And now for our story!"

The fire leaped as if in anticipation; a keener breeze stirred—it meant to bear the tale far and wide, for it was a very willful, summer breeze, without responsibility or purpose. The girls fell into easy attitudes, and every face was turned toward the Guardian.

"In a far Eastern country there was a great ruler who believed and trusted his subjects so perfectly that he did not fear to put them to

any test. But one day a rival ruler came from a near-by kingdom and scoffed at him and told him that the loyalty of his people was only eye-service-loyalty, it could stand no real test. This made the first ruler very sad and angry, and he said he would prove his subjects. So he had a great well dug and lined it with marble, and then he issued his command. Alone, and by night, every man should go and empty a measure of rich milk in the well until it should be filled. And then he waited. Night after night passed, and at last the well was full; and then the faithful ruler went alone with his brother-ruler to see the result. The well was full of—water! Each man, believing he would be the only one to cheat, had dared to do wrong and the poor ruler knew at last what their loyalty had meant."

When the story was ended, the girls sat very quietly thinking. After some time Margaret Lee spoke gently, with a little break in her voice.

"Hiatini, we have no record of work done, to-night. At our next meeting we will try, every one of us, to pour some real, sweet, good milk in the well. And when you hear and see

our effort, you will know that we mean to be loyal and faithful subjects to our Guardian."

"Hear! hear!" cried Nancy, and a shout went up.

"But I'm thinking," said Jane Trevor, "that it is quite a shame for us to keep this wonderful camp to ourselves. We want to spread the gospel, and—Nancy may like to get material —what do you say to asking Mary and Sally to join our ranks?"

"Fine! Great! How like you, Jane, to think of it," came the answer. All but Sylvia joined in.

"Any objections?" asked Jane. "The Dauntless seems to hesitate."

"I was only thinking!" Sylvia flushed, "that they could not possibly understand or appreciate. They are so dull and—different. It might prove a—mistake to—give them false ideas."

"Piffle!" Nancy ejaculated. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if they shamed us. Who says 'Aye'?" The motion was carried and Nancy and Margaret delegated to interview them on the morrow.

"And now the evening hymn and—bed!"

said Miss Rose. The girls stood up and with clasped hands sang sweetly and reverently:

"Lay me to sleep in sheltering flame,
O Master of the Hidden Fire.
Wash pure my heart and cleanse for me
My soul's desire.
In flame of sunrise bathe my mind,
O Master of the Hidden Fire,
That, when I wake, clear-eyed may be
My soul's desire."

Then the fire was extinguished and a tired, happy group stole to bed.

But down in a small, stuffy room in the home of Sally Temple, an embryo novelist, by the light of a very smelly kerosene lamp, made a few notes for future use.

"Miss Fay—real ladylike and kind. Not polite enough to make you uncomfortable, but just enough to make you want to be like her. A—a—real inspiration!"

"Jane Trevor—smart and fascinating—she could make you jealous of your beau in about an hour, only she'd be too nice to do a mean trick. Clothes look swell without costing much. Style! Ways of her own! Would make a good character—if she was handsome."

"Joy Deering—no plain leadings as to her. Watch her!"

"Nancy Mowbray. Dandy! A real fine girl and awful funny. Make good character as a kind of female clown, only more ladylike."

"Sylvia Dean—I hate her! Good character for villain-lady. Smarty! ought to be taken down!"

Sally Temple wanted "material" and was wasting no time in the getting of it!

The clock in the living room of the little gray house struck eleven, and Sylvia Dean awoke with a start. She sat up in bed and dazedly put out her hand in the dark,—an outstretched hand met hers! It was a cold, small hand. Sylvia smothered a rising scream in the patch-work quilt, and chattered!

"What do you want?"

"Oh, Sylvy," whispered a meek, small voice, "can't you make room to squeeze me in?"

It was Joy Deering.

"Make room?" Sylvia's voice had a bit of a sneer mingled with its quaking. "Room is about the only thing I cannot make. Wait! Let's put the quilt around us and sit on the edge of the cot." Side by side the two clung, and the patch-work bound them together.

"It's—it's—fierce!" confided Joy; "can you stand it, Sylvy? Of course I couldn't back out alone—but if there were two—of us!"

Sylvia did not answer.

"I just know how it will be. Work and dark nights and never a party or any real fun and snakes and hoppy things and—and thunderstorms and mice in the cellar—you know what that Sally said about swing shelves and mice not getting things. And Sylvy, we could have nice, safe hotels and parties and—and—comforts."

Still Sylvia did not speak.

"Just listen to the stillness now!" Joy pleaded.

"Why, I can hear—nothing but deathlike silence."

"Heavens! what is that?"

Two pairs of feet were gathered up under the covers. "A mouse?"

And then Sylvia spoke.

"No! I only touched your foot with mine. Joy, I just *dare not go away.* That would take more courage than to stay,—thunderstorms, mice, and everything else considered. You see it would be just admitting that we

could not rough it; had to have our sugar plums. Grandfather would never respect me again. He's rich—but he's—he's a gentleman and he just admires Miss Rose and Margaret Lee. Why, if I went back I'd feel like a poor baby with one of those rubber things in my mouth—getting a substitute to keep me from howling."

Joy Deering was thinking.

"I—I—do not want to go alone, Sylvy," she whimpered.

"Well, I dare not go!" Dauntless proclaimed. "I'm going to see this thing through for Grandfather's sake. He lived through Libby Prison; I guess I can—stand this. Pluck up, Joy, maybe we'll wrench something from it all. Go to bed, child, and—forget it. Do you know I am—half—dead for sleep!" She yawned broadly. "And the supper was awfully good!"

Joy Deering slipped to the floor.

"Isn't it queer," she faltered, "to find how much harder it is to run away than stay?" Then, going to the window: "Oh, look, Sylvy, at the moonlight on the meadow below the hill. How soft and white it looks. Quite velvety.

And see! There's Uncle Silas as sure as you live and breathe! He's smoking his pipe and leaning against a tree. How safe and friendly he looks. Good-night, Sylvy; we'll die together, Dauntless."

"All right, Wap. Turn in, and 'to-morrow is to-morrow.'"

CHAPTER IV

TURN ABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

And after the breakfast dishes had been cleared away to the accompaniment of many a song and merry jest, the next morning, Margaret and Nancy started forth to see what they could do about getting Mary and Sally to join their Camp Fire Circle.

Mrs. Allen and Mary were busy in the great shining kitchen of the Allen Place down at the farm. Since five o'clock they had been up and doing, and both were a bit tired and irritable. Mrs. Allen was making a "mess of pies" by the broad kitchen window overlooking the lane leading to the road, and Mary was "rubbing up the silver," for the minister was coming to dinner and much remained yet to be done.

"I don't care, Ma, what you say," Mary was saying as she polished away energetically; "singing *does* help. Work flies when you sing. I could learn the words and music,

they're awful catchy—and there is a line like this

"'Everybody owes a rub! rub! rub!'"

"Lands save us, Mary, I'll rub, rub, rub you the wrong way if you don't stop your shallowness. Singing to your work! Who ever heard such rubbish. Work is work and singing is singing. Fancy your pa and the hired men coming in and hearing you and me skylarking as we dished up cabbage and corned beef. From your telling, that company up to the old Fay Place must be considerable loony. I guess if Aunt Patsy Fay could look down on such doings, her blood would curdle. Patsy Fay never got her emotions and ideas mixed up, and she was the dignifiedest critter I ever sot my eyes on. Good lands! Who is that coming up the lane right in the middle of the morning?"

Mary, teapot in hand, ran to the window.

"Oh, Ma, it's them! Two of them! The ones they call Margaret and Nancy. Oh, Ma, they've come to call real neighborly-like. Ain't they sweet?"

"Sweet?" Mrs. Allen was in real terror.

"Sweet? Calling right in my busy time. Land save us; rush to the front door, Mary, and head them off!"

"Oh, Ma, they're making for the back door. I couldn't head 'em off without getting in front of them and hustling them about. Do, Ma, let 'em come right in."

"In the kitchen! Them strangers! What do you think the parlor is for, Miss? Why did I spend time and money on that front room if not for company? Lands!" And at that moment Margaret and Nancy stood at the screen door, their bright faces beaming with fun and good will.

"What a perfectly charming room!" Margaret exclaimed, "and, Mary, I am sure this is your mother! Good morning, Mrs. Allen; please may we come in?"

Mrs. Allen was elbow deep in flour and dough, so she nodded and said:

"Step in if you prefer kitchens to parlors. Good-morning."

"Oh! we love kitchens," Nancy cried, following Margaret in, "and this one is—a peach! Excuse me, Mrs. Allen, I know I'm not a bit polite to use such language, and

Margaret—this is Margaret Lee—is scowling fearfully. I'm Nancy Mowbray. Oh! look at that honeysuckle across the window! And the smell! No wonder you are such a famous cook."

In spite of herself Mrs. Allen's face relaxed, and Mary was grinning with delight.

"How on earth did you hear of my cooking?" The dough clung to the firm hands, which were trying to toss it lightly aside.

"Uncle Silas and Miss Rose. Miss Rose says the memory of your strawberry pies has cheered the darkest hours of her life. The crust, she says, was a dream of bliss. She's never been able to conquer the trick."

"These be strawberry pies," admitted Mrs. Allen, freeing herself of the dough at last and tossing it on the rolling board.

"I just knew it," said Nancy.

"Oh! Mrs. Allen," and now Margaret went over and stood beside the table, while Nancy stepped across the room to Mary. "I was just thinking. Couldn't you give us all lessons in pie making? The thought came to me like a flash this very minute. Couldn't we come down here and take lessons?"

"Lands!" Mrs. Allen stared at the sweet young face beside her. Under the broad yellow linen hat, Margaret's eyes looked deeper and kinder and bluer than ever and the woman relaxed, as all women did to Margaret.

"I ain't looking for an extra job," she said, patting the dough lovingly now that she had got it under control; "my time is pretty well took up."

"Oh! but we could do our little specialty in return."

At this Mrs. Allen stared, holding a flaky mass of dough at arm's length.

"Doing work to music," explained Margaret; "Nan, give Mrs. Allen an example."

At this Nancy took up a cloth and began to polish silver with an energy and purpose never before witnessed by the surprised Mrs. Allen.

"For all good work divides by hearts,
So learn the song and know the parts and *you* owe a rub,
rub, rub!"

Mary laughed gleefully and caught the words and tune quickly. The silver shone and sparkled and lay in glittering rows, while Margaret tapped the floor keeping time and joining in with her sweet, clear voice.



THESE BE STRAWBERRY PIES—
ADMITTED MRS ALLEN

"Land sakes!" cried Mrs. Allen at last; "if you keep on, I'll be adding my contralto."

"Do! Do!" the girls all cried.

"Rub! Rub! Rub!" Mrs. Allen burst in, making the dough hop with excitement.

"Mary!" ejaculated Mrs. Allen suddenly, "while we've been skylarking the parlor has been left—undusted! The minister is coming at noon!"

"Just another blessing!" Nancy and Mary had finished the silver. "Lead on, Mary, and see the dust fly—out of the window. Come in, Meg!"

The mad trio rushed from the kitchen, and the mistress stood aghast.

"Well! of all creatures," she panted. "If that ain't impudence. But the way Mary rushed to tackle work beats me. And them two strangers taking liberties in this house! Rub! Rub! Rub!—land! what a fool I be and yet—" Mrs. Allen looked at the bright silver and listened to the girlish voices singing away in the parlor;—"it would be kind of fun to set work to music, Mary and me! If tunes bring harmony in church, and soothe dying beds and put little children to sleep, there's

no sense in holding out against them when you're working full tilt. Rub! Rub! Rub!"

And then the three came back, jubilantly waving their dusters.

"That parlor certainly has had a surprise party," gasped Mary, "and Ma, Margaret cut and fixed flowers in the vases, and Nancy draped the new curtains in the latest style. I guess the minister will sit up and take notice to-day. And, Ma—Margaret has something to ask you! And please, Ma—don't answer first clip, please—wait five minutes before you answer."

The pleading in poor Mary's face was almost pathetic. Margaret went over to the table. The beautiful pies were ready for the oven and they were good to look at.

"We want Mary to be a Camp Fire Girl, Mrs. Allen. We want her very much. We know how busy you are, and we shall be so glad and happy to help Mary with her work. Besides, it would mean so much to us to have you teach us—housekeeping. You see, we are going to try to be good home-makers some day, and some of us live in tiny flats with

kitchenettes and we want to learn home ways."

Mrs. Allen's eyes were on the clock. She wanted to be fair and just, but this onslaught had unnerved her. Margaret meant to make the most of her five minutes.

"It's only give and take, dear Mrs. Allen. You teach us to work beautifully. We will not be in the way, nor bother you, and then let us have Mary every evening for an hour or two. We are going to read some fine books, and Miss Rose has ordered a piano from the village; we'll sing and get near each other. We just need Mary!"

The five minutes were up! Mrs. Allen wiped her heated face and took to questioning, which from her was always a hopeful sign.

"And Mary to wear them togs like what she has been explaining about?"

"Yes, Mrs. Allen. Sylvia Dean's grandfather sent two extra suits down in case of need. Mary is one of the needs."

Nancy was standing and watching this scene with amused eyes. She never could have handled it as Margaret was doing.

"We'll always bring Mary to the bars at the foot of the lane, Mrs. Allen. We'll come

in a body. We have a perfectly fascinating song called *Mammy Moon;* we'll sing that to let you know we are coming, and you'll leave a light in the window to cheer us and guide us. Oh! please, Mrs. Allen, it will be such fun and—"

"Such snappy work!" Nancy burst in, unable to restrain herself any longer.

Somehow this break caused every one to relax.

"Land sake!" Mrs. Allen suddenly exclaimed, her kindly face all aglow. "I'd put you both out of this house bag and baggage if it wasn't for Miss Rose Fay. As it is, I might just as well say yes, I suppose, in order to get rid of you. It's nigh onto eleven—yes, Mary shall be one of them foolish acting girls if it will do you any good, and if you don't get underfoot you can come, one at a time, and learn cooking. The chances are I'll be saving the life of some man who may happen to be silly enough to marry you by and by. And now clear out, or I'll be singing that plaguey tune again, it's got into my feet."

"Oh! thank you, thank you, Mrs. Allen!" cried Margaret, while Nancy waltzed around

the big, sunny kitchen with the bewitched Mary.

After leaving the house Nancy and Margaret walked along for a time in silence; then Nancy aired her feelings.

"If we've got to wrench our members by the sweat of our brows and the labor of our hands —I think they come high!"

Margaret laughed.

"I think it is splendid," she said; "why Nan, this scheme of ours is a two-edged sword. We'll get a liberal education if we work the thing right and we'll carry a bit of happiness to others. Now—for Sally Temple."

"Well, I hope her price isn't a course in cooking and parlor work. Whew! for a hot July day I think day labor is pretty severe penance."

The Temple house was in Compton Corners near the post office. Mr. Temple kept the village store and the family home was beside it. It was a neat place and Mrs. Temple and Sally were on the front porch as the girls came up.

"If there ain't two of them now!" exclaimed Sally dropping the basket of peas she was helping her mother shell.

Mrs. Temple was a pretty, weak looking woman dressed in a white gown, her hair curled and arranged in a marvelous fashion high on her head. She clutched the basket Sally let drop and carried that, and the pan she held, into the house. When she returned she was all smiles and bows and quite the real lady!

"Do set down!" she said shaking hands and looking a little undecided as to whether she should kiss Margaret and Nancy. "Sally has been telling me all about you. It must be real fascinating up to the hill. We remember Miss Fay—her family always stood well hereabouts. We're real glad to welcome her and her friends."

Mrs. Temple spoke as if she were the mayor of the town and giving the freedom of the place to distinguished visitors.

Nancy had a strong inclination to giggle and dropped her eyes for fear she might wink at Margaret who was assuming an expression of superhuman dignity.

They had a little more talk on general subjects and then Margaret told what they had really come for.

"We would like so very much to have Sally join our Camp Fire Club. We are going to read evenings, play games and sing, and once a week have a real ceremonial and a fire—unless it is too hot, and then we'll have candles. Of course Sally may not care to come every evening; it is quite a distance."

"Oh! I would, I would!" cried Sally excitedly; "I could stay all night with Mary. She's real near, you know."

Mrs. Temple was considering. She was one of those women who weigh and consider from a very selfish point of view and then break suddenly into many words giving the impression that they had not thought at all.

'Why it's simply fascinating!" She presently burst out; "perfectly fascinating and I'm sure Sally and me are real pleased, but it couldn't possibly be every evening, daughter."

"Oh! Ma, why not?" Sally resorted to sulks very easily.

"We must think of—Pa!" Mrs. Temple issued this in a hushed and awed voice.

"Oh, Pa," snipped Sally on the point of tears. "It's always Pa and the Governor and the President and the old White House. I just hate them all."

Mrs. Temple looked genuinely shocked and felt some explanation was necessary.

"You see, it is this way," she said, looking weakly at her visitors. "Mr. Temple is really a great man, a man of intellect and his towns-people are running him for office—he may go to—Bosting and I've always said and Sally has heard me, 'give Pa Temple a chance in the right direction and his end is secure.' Haven't I said that over and again, Sally."

"Oh, yes, Ma, and a whole lot else of—stuff."

Mrs. Temple took no notice of this impertinence.

"And what's more," she ran on, "Mr. Temple's wife and daughter has got to help him. We can't afford to show preferences or take sides. We go to both churches—Baptist here and Presbyterian over Landis way. One in the morning; one in the evening and turn about. There are the two weekly prayer meetings, and the Ladies' Aids, and—"

"Ma! I just can't stand it." Sally sprang up and stood in front of her mother, "I ain't

going to be religioned into an early grave. So there! I'm going up to the hill and play heathen *some* of the time if I bust! So there! I just know Pa will let me. He told me himself he was about wore out 'twixt hell fire and cold plunges—"

"Sally!"

Mrs. Temple was driven to self-assertion.

"Another word and you'll go to the—Catholic Sunday School."

"Oh! Oh!" wailed Sally. "Oh! Oh!"

During the scene Margaret's face grew more and more solemn and Nancy's was a study for a comic artist.

"Oh! Mrs. Temple," Margaret spoke rapidly as if expecting another deluge; "maybe we could get her for one or two nights. Let's see. What nights are the prayer meetings?"

"Wednesday and Friday!" Sally snapped, stamping her foot angrily, "and silly old things they are, too."

"And the Ladies' Aids?" Margaret rushed on.

"Afternoons! the hideous messes! Making ugly clothes for heathens that don't want 'em and ought'n to have them."

"Well, that leaves Monday, Tuesday and Saturday evenings, Mrs. Temple."

"Saturday night is tub night—" Mrs. Temple put in feebly.

"I ain't any dirtier Saturday night then I be Saturday afternoon. I can tub Saturday afternoon." Sally was driving her Mother to the wall.

"We'll expect Sally then at least twice a week, may we not, Mrs. Temple? We'll try and give her a good time."

Margaret's sweet ladylike ways were winning Mrs. Temple, but Nancy's face was attracting her attention. It dawned upon her that Nancy was not as impressed as she should be—and that was a humiliating feeling for Mrs. Temple to have.

"I'll—I'll think it over," Mrs. Temple said slowly eyeing Nancy. Then Nancy made her dash for favor.

"Perhaps we can help Mr. Temple," she smiled her prettiest. "Miss Rose knows all the people and they all love her. We might give Mr. Temple a—boost."

"A what?" The lady in the rocker looked aghast.

"A—a boost! A boom, you know. We might have a torch light procession or a bonfire and speeches and ice cream and lemonade, or if there was too big a crowd—pop beer!"

"Lands!" Mrs. Temple leaned back; "you sound real—unwomanly. But then you are pretty young. I just can't abide an unwomanly woman—I want that Sally should be real sexful. It pays!"

Margaret got up and drew the call to a quick end.

"We'll just trust to luck for Sally," she said, shaking hands, "I think you'll let her come. We must hurry now for dinner. Three miles to walk and Joy and Sylvia are cooks to-day. Good-by; good-by."

When the two girls were safely beyond sight of Mrs. Temple and Sally, they paused to take breath. Neither had spoken until that moment but both had laughed until their eyes were overflowing.

"Oh! Meg!"

"Oh! Nancy!"

"Meg, ain't she—fierce?"

"Nan—isn't it too, too awful? And yet I never saw a girl who *needed* Miss Rose more."

"Nor a mother who needed, so much a —spanking. Just think of poor Pa in the White House with Ma!"

"Nancy!"

"And think of Sylvia hobnobbing with the defiant Sally! And won't Joy do her up on close acquaintance? But that hell fire and cold plunge wasn't a bit bad. It was picturesque and expressive. Meg—the minx has—a flow of language and a sense of humor. My! what a morning. We've got two members at the expense of nerves and muscle and to think we have a dinner by Joy and Sylvia to comfort us at the trip's end. I can catch the odors even here. Capsule soup, limp lettuce and scorched potatoes. Fudge for dessert and—finger bowls. Ha! Ha!"

But no such disaster confronted them. Upon reaching the little gray house they were met by Miss Rose and the other girls who were beaming and beckoning them to hurry on.

"I'm not going to use my strength up for lettuce and fudge!" Nancy groaned. And just then Miss Rose came close enough to announce.

"Such a strange thing has happened. We

found a big hamper at the door with a dinner—and such a dinner—all cooked and complete."

"Thank Heaven!" Nancy exploded, rushing ahead.

"It fell like manna from Heaven!" Sylvia further explained. "I went out to get some lettuce that was hanging in the well and there was no hamper! Joy went out to get some fudge she had put to cool in the ice house, and there *was* a hamper!"

"And not a note or anything!" gasped Jane skipping about like a merry little tyke. "And such cooking—um! um!"

Nancy paused in her walk.

"Have you snitched?" she asked anxiously.

"Never a snitch! but oh! the sniffs and the looks. A chicken!"

"Merciful heaven." Nancy joined Jane.

"Go on," she pleaded.

"And gravy in a milk bottle. And a loaf of bread and—and—a pie, an apple pie—green apple pie. And a dish of macaroni, and cheese an inch thick on top! And—a chocolate cake!"

At this Nancy simply fled and the others followed on a run.

"Oh! Sylvia," Margaret said as she pantingly kept apace—"think from what you have been saved!"

"And—you," said Sylvia without a thought of being funny.

The magic dinner was spread out upon the table and it was only after the hungry group had been satisfied that Jane Trevor said:

"Now that you've tested it, Miss Rose, can you venture a guess as to who sent it."

"I cannot. The Corners is noted for its good cooks and my dear Aunt Patsy was greatly beloved. I am sure some noble woman friend of hers took pity upon us."

"She was noble all right!" Nancy leaned back in her chair a happier and fuller girl—"do you think your Aunt Patsy had enough noble friends to—to—carry us through the summer in this gracious fashion?"

Every one shouted.

"I hope not," said Miss Rose; "it would interfere with my plans very much, not to mention my pride. We must provide for ourselves. Those of us who do not know how to cook must learn!"

Dear Miss Rose tried to look severe. And

then Margaret explained Mrs. Allen's cooking classes.

"I see Sylvia doing the humble pie act in the farmhouse kitchen!" groaned Joy. "And I see poor little me being rapped on the noddle for spilling things on the table and burning up the food."

"Come, Wap—cheer up," Nancy cried, "if the cricket can turn from her office ways and be wise in house-lore, you can. By the way, any mail?"

"Oh! yes, and five letters for you, Nancy." Miss Rose replied rising to get them.

"And what do you think?" Jane burst out. "I forgot to tell you, too. Judge Conly has given me four weeks more vacation. He says if I come home before that he'll discharge me. He and Sylvia's grandfather are going off on a trip with some one—and I'm not wanted."

"Oh! most wise Judge!" quoted Margaret, "isn't this a—a great day for us?"

CHAPTER V

SILAS JUNIOR

It was their first rainy day! A real cold, windy day. A fire was burning on the hearth in the living room and it was four in the afternoon.

Joy Deering and Sylvia Dean were swaying back and forth before the blazing logs and from above stairs came the sound of Nancy's merry jokes; Margaret's laugh and Miss Rose's quiet remarks.

"The poor Cricket hasn't come up from her cooking lesson has she?" asked Sylvia with a droop to her pretty mouth.

"Not yet." The Wap was wrapped in gloom.

"She'll take her death. It's the kind of wet that gets into your bones. Ooh!"

"The Cricket never was better in her life. I will say that for this—Country life in America."

"Oh! Joy, don't take to joking. Nancy

gets onto my nerves. She always sounds as if she were speaking to an audience or dictating to a stenographer. That endless cheerfulness of hers is dreadfully depressing."

"Oh! Daunty, cheer up. It's not half so bad. We are all blooming; never better in our lives. A big hotel would bore us, you know, and Nancy is a darling. Think how she wouldn't let any one tease you about those cookies you learned to make at Mrs. Allen's! Salt instead of sugar was a test to put Nancy's wit to—but she never batted an eye, as Sally says."

"The memory of those cooking lessons makes me ill," Sylvia groaned, "and Mrs. Allen is so—so—ordinary. Do you know what she said to me the other day? She said it was shameful that I had been permitted to grew up in such ignorance. And just because I said I didn't know when water was boiling! She said if Mary hadn't known that much when she was *born* she'd have spanked her. Country people are so—so vulgar. And I tell you right now, Joy Deering, if Grandfather hadn't burned my bridges by going off with Jane's old Judge and shutting

up the house, I'd have gone home to-day. When it's clear and the fun is going on it's all right, but to *work* in the rain is hideous and Miss Rose is so—insistent and besides one cannot be different from the others! Oh! Joy, don't you yearn to put on a party gown and look—fine?"

"There's no law against it!" Joy replied. "We each have party togs in case of an emergency."

"That's it—but there's no emergency!" The Dauntless looked peevish. "Besides, although Nancy says she has one, she will never show it. She keeps her trunk locked. She's awfully mean about some things and she never draws a line between jokes and truths."

"The rest of us have party things any way and, oh! Sylvy, I have an idea. Let's all dress up this evening after supper and *play* 'reception'! We'll make candy over the open fire and bake potatoes and have great fun."

The Dauntless showed signs of reviving.

"I believe you like this life, Joy," she said.

"Daunty, I do. I confess. I never had so much fun for so little in all my days. Father and Mother have left me free to return and

I just—can't! Every time I think of you all at a Ceremonial or around the lamps of an evening reading—the thought of a silly summer hotel makes me ill. Honestly, I like it, rain, thunder, mice and all!"

"Well, the idea of dressing up isn't bad. It's too rainy for that awful Sally Temple to come up and we can be just our ownies to-night. Let's tell the others!"

Away they ran upstairs, and the pretty living room with its glow and old-fashioned comfort was left empty until presently a drippy little figure entered and looked sur-prisedly around. The small wet person was Jane, the Cricket, and her face was all a-glow, her eyes shining and her pretty hair escaping from her rubber hood, curling delightfully.

Dear little Jane went back to the hall and took off her outer wraps and high water-tight boots, then she tip-toed, stocking-footed into the room again, and nestled down upon the floor, before the welcome heat.

It was no longer the pale Jane of the office, but a rosy dimpled Jane with the breeziest manner. Three weeks had wrought a marvel in her and she was as happy as a bird.

"What a day!" she whispered toasting her toes luxuriously. "I can make bread fit to eat, three kinds of pies—one kind of crust for them! And I've 'hung' a skirt for dear Mrs. Temple, and shown Mary how to put hooks on her waist so they won't hump. Oh! how I love it all. The dearness and funniness and differentness. Some day the precious Mother and I are going to have the weeniest house in the country. The real country like this—the red barn country! The Mother is going to be jolly once more—she says the city stifles her; it will me, too, after this! How am I to get —the country?"

Jane held one foot out daintily as if that small member were questioning the busy fanciful brain. "You saucy thing! Why—the Judge is going to—well! not die, but have a change of heart. He's going to say—'now, Jane Trevor, a few thousands to me more or less, don't count, but if you'll do up all my jams and pickles and send all my fresh eggs and butter down from your country seat that I'm going to provide for you; and if you'll promise to make your mother jolly again—we'll call it a bargain!"

With this flight of fancy Jane huddled her knees in her arms and fixed her pretty eyes on the heart of the flame.

"How can I ever stand the typewriter again?" she whispered; "and a steam radiator and—the subway?"

"Cricket!" came a call from upstairs, "is that you?"

"Yes, Hiatini!"

"Why aren't you—singing?"

"Going to—at once, Guardy."

And a brave little trill echoed through the house.

"Very wet, childie?"

"Blessedly so, but dry as a piece of popped corn now. I know how to make batter pudding, Hiatini and—corn muffins."

"Fine! But come upstairs now, dear. We have a great plan. Supper at five-thirty and a big reception afterward. Full dress—your gray cloudy thing with yellow roses! And we're going to talk society. Come up!"

Jane was upstairs before Miss Rose had ceased speaking.

"Who's coming?" she asked breathlessly.

"That's it," answered Sylvia from her wig-

wam (the bedrooms were all wigwams by now).

"If only there was one *boy*. I know boys are generally fussy and unnecessary, but at times they do fit in. They seem to go with your nice clothes and dances. At such times they are necessary."

"Nan, dear, what are you to wear?" Jane leaned against Nancy's door.

"I'll show you later. You girls do not believe me, but I have a party dress. A stunner. But I haven't had a walk to-day and I'll go for the mail right after supper. The R. F. D. goes past the pasture at 6:30. You all get ready and I'll come down and surprise you."

Nancy was writing by the western window and stopped to answer Jane with a twinkle in her eye.

"What you writing, Nan?"

At this the laugh left Nancy's cheery face and she beckoned Jane in.

"Make yourself comfy on the trunk or bed, Janey, I want to 'fess. I'm writing a story! It's getting out of my system. You know how I have often wanted to do it but always the *story* seemed caged and couldn't get free.

Since I've been here—the door of the cage has opened. Not much, dear, I'm never going to burst into glory, but the vital spark is kind of—peeping forth. You'll laugh, I know, but Sally Temple has helped me more than any one else."

"Sally Temple?" Jane had sunk luxuriously on the steamer trunk. Jane was one of those girls who could have rested gracefully on a blacksmith's forge. She relaxed so prettily.

"Sally Temple of all people."

"Yes, Sally. I cannot tell you why, but when alone with her she—well, she has the faculty of—setting me free. She's a lot more like her father than her mother. Ma Temple simply brings out the Sally of her; dear, gentle little Pa turns her into Sarah at once. That child has got to have a test to make her find herself, Janey Trevor, but in the meantime she's helping me find myself. Think what she said to me the other day when we were out walking?"

Jane shook her head.

"Nancy," she said and then gave that Sally —giggle of hers. "Do you ever think that

there is a real story in every house in this town? People shut the doors and windows and keep the story in—but it's there." And then she told me the sweetest thing about Miss Rose's old Aunt Patsy. Sally had traced it all by herself from things she had heard. You should have seen Sally's eyes; when she forgot herself in her story she was Sarah through and through.

"Couldn't I hear a bit of it now?" pleaded Jane.

"Nary a bit! And now scamper, Janey. I'm at a high pitch and I must make the most of this diluted daylight. I'm writing a play for us all."

There was an early supper that evening and Miss Rose and Margaret were the cooks—"thank kind Providence," as Joy Deering said. "A doleful night with Sylvy and me as cooks would be laying it on too thick."

"Well," Miss Rose had laughingly replied, "at least you two recognize your limitations; that's something and Mrs. Allen is making some impression. She told me the other day that Sylvia's grip of an egg beater was growing firmer with every lesson and that Joy had a 'real sense' about 'seasoning cookies.'"

Sylvia and Joy looked at each other shyly.

The supper on that wet and drippy night was a good one. Toast done to a golden crispness, melted maple sugar that, with artistic manipulation at the right moment could be stirred into the most delicious candy; thin slices of cold ham, nicely fried potatoes and a big luscious cake,—"snow-bound" Nancy declared as she smacked her lips at the creamy icing.

"But for cake as was cake pure and simple!" Jane cried, holding her own slice daintily; "do you all remember that chocolate dream that came in the manna—sent from heaven-hamper?"

"You ungrateful little wretch!" exclaimed Nancy. "Isn't the present cake good enough company for you?"

"Yes. The other;" Jane set her teeth in the "present company" and smiled dreamily; "is now merely a sacred memory. No one but an artist could have made that. An artistic woman who, had she not been a specialist in chocolate cake, would have been a leader of men and women! Miss Rose, why is it that a man can never be a good general cook, but can only qualify in one thing?"

"I'm sure I do not know, Janey. They may be other kinds for all I could say to the contrary."

"Well, there are not. Over and again I've put them to the test. Sunday nights mother and I have go-as-you-please suppers. Any one who comes in may take a hand. It's lots of fun but awfully messy. Tod Nilson makes a divine Rarebit and his chum Jimmy Nichols can create creamed oysters—not prepare them—but create them. But when a general supper is in order made of leavings they are no good at all." A sigh floated through space following Jane's remarks.

"What's the matter, Sylvia?" asked Miss Rose.

"Oh! I'm sure you will disapprove very much, dear Hiatini!" Sylvia replied; "but Jane's description of those Sunday night suppers make me positively green with envy. Say what you please, boys and men *do* have their place in the scheme of things, as our minister says. Of course we can do without them and still have a good time. I wouldn't want many of them or often on such a vacation as this—but just fancy—" Sylvia's

pretty, fair face with the little freckles on her cunning nose, looked earnest—"just fancy, if on such a night as this when we are all dressed up and making believe a couple of real jolly boys tramped in—"

"A couple?" Nancy broke in fervently. "Well, you are unselfish, Sylvy; aren't you and Joy going to have any—not to mention Meg and Miss Rose?"

A general laugh rang out at Sylvia's expense. She pouted and then went on:

"Anyway—a jolly, good fellow—if only *one* of him, would add zeal to a bit of fun and nice clothes."

Miss Rose looked quite serious for a moment and then she cheered up.

"You all have society enough during the winter," she said. "I believe in co-ed and co-social as you all very well know, but for this dear resting time and growing time I do believe it is best as it is."

To the merriest kind of singing and joking the dishes were washed and put away and the rooms made tidy.

"We must get Uncle Silas to bring in a generous supply of wood when he comes to-

night," Miss Rose said as she laid on a fresh log or two. "And the rain has ceased, I do declare! Nancy are you going to meet the Free Delivery Man?"

"Yes, Hiatini."

"Then put these letters in the box for collection to-morrow morning, dear, and hurry back and dress for the party."

At seven-thirty Sylvia Dean stole out of her wigwam a dream of beauty. Softly she tip-toed downstairs, entered the living room and stood before the small mirror between the windows.

"It's the first time I've seen myself really, since I've been here," she murmured. "That splinter of glass in my bedroom doesn't count. I don't often dare to look in it, I seem so—changed. Oh, those freckles!" Sylvia wrinkled her nose, "and the tan on my neck! And my waist is too tight—I'm actually getting fat."

The sweet white gown with its dainty wreath of rose buds outlining the "Dutch-neck," was very becoming to the fluffy, blonde girl.

"And my pumps are two small. Oh! dear I'm afraid I'm—I'm—expanding!"

A quick, cautious step on the stairs roused Sylvia from her revery and she turned to face Jane Trevor in a love of a dress. It was pale gray and had bright twinkling trimming that looked like stars in a mist.

"It's—stunning, Janey, and don't you dare tell me you made it yourself."

"Mother and I—but oh! Sylvy, it was all right when I was a white, colorless snip, but I look simply ferocious in gray now with my brown and red complexion and Sylvy—I weigh six pounds more than I did when I came here. I was weighed yesterday!"

"Heavens!" Sylvia exclaimed. "I dare not be weighed, I'm sure we'll all be sights when we go back."

"But oh! Sylvy—isn't it heavenly here? The openness and sweetness and quiet. I rather hate clothes—all but our khaki costumes—I'm a free creature and I adore this life. If I only had my little mother, a few books and the big sky I'd be—content."

"Jane Trevor! And you with your chums

and those Sunday night suppers where boys just naturally—go! Why you're the envy of —of—my set."

Sylvia's burst of confidence made Jane laugh. "I'd change them all," she said presently, "for the dear—this!" She went to the window, opened it and looked out. The room was a bit warm with the open fire, but outside a crisp breeze was stirring.

"There's the star over the Brave Pine," Jane spoke tenderly, "and the lights twinkling at The Corners"—she thought of the "story in each house" and smiled and—"good gracious!"

"What's the matter?" asked Sylvia from the mirror.

"I thought—I saw a—a—man."

"Good heavens! where?" Sylvia was at the window; "was it—Uncle Silas?"

"I'm sure it wasn't. He was thinner and —and—he was dropping down from the piazza roof!"

"Oh! Shut that window, Jane Trevor, and let's call Miss Rose. This is awful! It's the kind of thing I knew would happen sometime in this desolate place."

"I think;" Jane closed the window. "I think I only imagined it, Sylvy. I'm sure there was no man. It—was—a joke!"

"Well, it's a ghastly one and I'm all of a flutter. Is my nose red?"

"No, it's only speckly. Here are the others!" And in they came, Miss Rose in a quaint, trailing gown of white with lavender flowers on it, Margaret in a pink organdie and Joy in a filmy blue affair that floated about the little figure like a cloud.

Joy's lips were turning up at the corners quite often now—she had learned to be merry and her eyes had a twinkle.

"Just look at the Wap!" exclaimed Jane, rushing to Joy and taking her by the shoulders, "I did not realize the change in her when she wore her Wap-clothes. Why, child, you have color in your cheeks and you are developing a dimple. You're hair is tanned, too, it is goldly in the white. My! but you look—fetching!" Every one laughed—even Joy herself.

"Has Nancy come back yet?" asked Miss Rose.

"No!" Margaret replied. "I looked in her

wigwam as I came past. Give Nancy opportunity and she is always late. Miss Rose, please play a two-step—I feel jiggy."

The piano was a new addition and Miss Rose's treat. It was not a very fine instrument, but it was in tune and a constant delight. Away whirled the girls; Margaret and Sylvia; Jane and Joy.

Faster and faster the girls turned and tripped. Lightly, healthfully and merrily they went from living room to hall and dining room. Then suddenly something stopped them and they rushed together in the living room and listened.

"Gosh!" It was Uncle Silas' voice. "Who be you? And what yer want prowling around here I'd like to know?"

Sylvia looked at Jane in dismay.

"Why, Uncle Silas, don't you know me! I'm the son of your sister Kate down to Lost Point. She—" and then a whispered conversation followed while the listeners in the living room almost held their breaths.

"Waal! Waal! Waal!" Uncle Silas cried at last; "if this don't beat all. Sister Kate's lad and I ain't seen her since she was married!

Seems to me I heard her boy—what's that, she named you for me?—Silas Junior? Now what do you think of that? And you ain't lacking like report had it, but just timid? Lands! Lands! Here, Silas Junior, wait till I drop this load of wood I was a-haulin'. There, now, come on, I want that Miss Fay and the young ladies should see my nephy Silas."

"Do you suppose *he* was the one you saw dropping from the piazza roof?" whispered Sylvia to Jane.

"I told you that was a joke," Jane whispered back and then Uncle Silas appeared at the door with a tall lanky boy whose stiff dark hair hung around his forehead and neck. The boy's eyes were lowered shyly and he twirled his cap awkwardly. A long loose coat hung limply from his shoulders and the trousers, too short for the long limbs, reached to the tops of a pair of very muddy shoes.

"Miss Fay and girls!" said Uncle Silas from the doorway, "I want to make you acquainted with my nephy from Lost Point."

Miss Rose went forward and put out her hand graciously.

"How do you do?" she said. Then —"girls this is—"

"Silas Junior;" Uncle Silas added shaking with delighted laughter.

Jane mustered up courage and followed Miss Rose's example but the others made only a faint recognition of the introduction.

"Ain't they glad to see me?" The boy asked turning to Silas: "That one over there;" he pointed to Sylvia, "don't look especially—welcoming."

Sylvia flushed and Miss Rose hastily said: "You and your nephew come in, Uncle Silas. We're going to sing." Something had to be done and the ideal of good breeding at Compton Corners was at stake. There in the little New England town, every native was as good as any one else—unless he was a little better and Uncle Silas must not find them of the Camp Brave Pine lacking.

The little group around the piano began to sing. They began with a pretty ballad or two and then ran into college songs and some topical pieces of the day. They sang nervously and excitedly and Jane Trevor displayed a tendency to laugh hysterically which became

more and more alarming. Uncle Silas, in the best rocker and his working clothes was quite at his ease and tapped the floor with his big foot contentedly.

"Ain't they grand!" whispered Silas Junior in a tone perfectly heard by every one. "What they dressed to kill for?"

"Larks!" Uncle Silas replied in a muffled tone; "larking all the time. Made that way."

And then Junior got up and joined the group by the piano which contracted around Miss Rose at his advance.

"Ain't got any too good manners have you?" the boy asked Sylvia, thrusting something into her hand.

Sylvia stopped singing and looked affrightedly at the package—it was—her evening mail!

And then before she could speak or move Miss Rose started the dear familiar song of their camp.

"De day is pas' and gone, en what is done am done—
Ef yo' ain' done yo' bes' you'll be de Suf-frin' one;
Ole Time jes goes along en never kin turn back—"

Suddenly Junior joined in—

"O Mammy Moon, please keep watch until de mornin' Light—"

Startled and alarmed, Miss Rose turned on the piano stool and faced—Nancy Mowbray!

For a moment blank surprise held the group silent, then Uncle Silas roared with laughter.

"I swan!" he sputtered through his peals, "when she nigh upsot me by plumping inter me in the kitchen I didn't guess; but when she explained herself I just had to help along. Ain't she a likely nephy, though?"

"Nancy!" And then in spite of herself, Miss Rose laughed. "I never suspected you."

"It's my party dress!" Nancy gavotted around. "Come on, Meggie, now for a two-step."

The others did not rally from their shock so easily and it took them some time to recover themselves.

The rest of the evening however went off in a gale of fun and laughter. Silas Junior made himself agreeable to every one and Silas in the rocker enjoyed himself to the full. Candy was made on the fire and games were played and it was after ten when the party broke up.

"*Did* you see any one drop from the piazza roof? Sylvia asked Jane on the way up to the wigwams.

"Yes—but it was a joke, too," Jane giggled.

"Well," Sylvia tossed her head; "this party proves what I said at supper, even a make believe boy like Silas Junior, adds to the fun."

After the others were asleep Miss Rose tiptoed to Nancy Mowbray's door.

"Nancy?" she whispered.

"Come right in Hiatini. I knew you'd come. Here, sit on the bed—I won't be bad any more."

"Nan, dear, I do not mean to scold and you are very comical and made much fun for us all —but dear, you *will* be careful, won't you? I'm so anxious to make this summer a success. You all look so fine and well and I am sure it is doing us good and I want the home-people to approve. You'll—be careful?"

"Now, Hiatini, you are afraid of me! You do not wholly trust me, but please try to believe that my circumference of fun is sharply defined. I know my limits!"

"But Uncle Silas, Nan! He thought it so funny that he will tell every one."

"Never mind, dear Miss Rose, he'll temper it with mercy and I will be careful. 'Deed and 'deed I will, but you won't forbid my party dress."

"No, Nan, but—remember! And now kiss me you dear funny child—you Nameless One!"

CHAPTER VI

AN ADVENTURE FOR SYLVIA

It was one of the laws of the camp that two girls should supply all the necessaries each week; food and other things and alphabetically they took turns. Miss Rose was always —"ex officio."

It was simply marvelous how far Margaret Lee and Jane Trevor could make the twenty-four dollars go—for each one put in four—and to see how little Sylvia Dean and Joy Deering could do with the same amount.

"There are certain things to be done," Miss Rose had explained with, what Nancy called, her "cast-iron look," "and they must be done. Allowing for learning, every one of you must come up to the mark in time. Margaret has had much experience but she is practical and what one girl can do another equally intelligent can do also—within certain limitations."

And so they lived up to Margaret.

There was the laundry work. By sheer

force of mentality Uncle Silas induced Mercy Flanders of The Corners, to undertake it.

"They must fetch it and take it!" Mercy had stipulated. "I may be poor, but I come of the best and I ain't going to do no fetching and carrying for nobody!" Mercy cried easily and had "feelings" highly developed but she could "wash and iron you with the best" and she was very poor.

"As to fetching and carrying," Uncle Silas said, "I'll tend to that. Name your price, Mercy."

"Well, how would fifty cents apiece do?"

"A piece—what?" Silas demanded.

"A gal."

"Gosh. There's a difference 'twixt them," Silas explained. "Two of 'em might have double what all the others have. They warn't born free and equal though little Miss Fay is leveling them off good and proper. Now, Mercy, this is the offer I has to make from headquarters. Will you take 'em and wash and iron 'em for five dollars a week, they finding starch and soap; you finding water and tubs; me doing the hauling? Five dollars a week is more 'n twenty dollars a month and

you know they're going to stay on 'til September 20th. Now counting that up from July 1st it comes nigh on to fifty dollars and findings. With winter facing you, Mercy, and your feelings to be considered it ain't an offer to sneeze at."

Mercy considered.

"But they may pile on flim-flams," she said. "I ain't strong on fussy fol-de-rols, and sich."

"They'll be reasonable!" Silas replied, "and when you're getting your living, Mercy, you got to take some risks."

So the laundry was arranged for, and the rest, the girls and Miss Rose did for themselves. All that they accomplished was considered as "honors" and the glory piled up as necessity lashed them forward.

The "stars" added to each girl's name in the books she faithfully kept were becoming numerous and inspiring.

"Some of them are too easy," Jane Trevor said one day.

"Not having a cold for two months—fancy having a cold up here!"

"But you were always suffering before you came," Joy broke in.

"There and here, are altogether different."

"Mrs. Allen's cooking classes have brought me up," said Nancy.

"And us, too!" laughed Miss Rose.

"I've made a household invention!" announced Margaret; "I've rigged up a pulley system in the well. We can keep four different things down there at a time. There's a different colored string for each article. Yellow for butter, blue for milk, red for lettuce and white for cream.

"It wouldn't work at night," said Margaret practically, "and besides that's an outdoor invention."

"Well, anyway," Nancy broke in, "we're getting honors to burn and now that it is my week to serve you all, I trust I may make both ends meet and get a constellation. Who helps me, Hiatini?"

"Sylvia, Nan. She's served once with Joy and she can share her experience."

"It was a doleful one," Sylvia said. "It was the accounts that nearly finished me. Joy, do you remember?"

"Do I?" Joy groaned.

"Let's tell them," Sylvia suddenly exclaimed. "It's too good to keep."

"You may if you want to; I couldn't do it justice."

So Sylvia began and it was something of a triumph for her to own up to any short-coming.

"It was this way. Joy and I took pad and pencil and figured it all out even to items. Laundry work so much, food, oil, and—things and then we added up. It came to six dollars more than we had. We were horror stricken. I wanted to make it up. I knew Grandfather wouldn't mind, but Joy insisted that I keep to the bargain; she said she wasn't going to let me pauperize you all—that's just what she said. We worked over that list with the perspiration dripping from our faces; we hardly slept all one night. We couldn't see how it could have happened; we'd had about the same things to eat and I had shopped carefully and then we found out—we'd counted up wrong! We'd spent all we had but not a cent more!"

"It all came," Joy added, "from my counting without my fingers. I'll never do it again. If I can use my fingers I never make a mistake. Fingers were made before accounts anyway and they ought to be used."

"Well," Miss Rose said, "this week is in your care, Sylvia, and Nancy's fingers and wits must help you out. You two may plot and plan when and how you choose, the rest of us are going for a cross country run and I warn you we will bring home ferocious appetites. Beware!"

At nine o'clock, with all the work singingly performed and the others off for their run, Nancy and Sylvia went to the arbor overlooking the sunny meadow and took counsel together.

"I suppose," said Sylvia with a little sigh, "that if you go for potatoes you will have an adventure. You always do. I will just grub along through the week and get nothing but—"

"Grub out of it!" Nancy broke in with her eyes dancing. Then:

"Sylvy, do you know I never saw any one more improved than you are. You look real girly at times now and not a bit fussy and upperty."

"My waist is two inches larger!" groaned Sylvia.

"All the better for breathing."

"But I'll look a fright when I go back!" Sylvia made a comical grimace.

"You'll be stunning and so human," Nancy comforted. "By the way, Sylvy, isn't it queer how Sally Temple hovers around you? You seem to have a frantic fascination for her."

"I don't like her—" Sylvia admitted. "She makes me creepy. I cannot get the idea out of my head that she's caught hold of me somehow and I cannot get away. Her eyes are always on me when she is here and sometimes when I am alone I fancy that she is hiding and peeping—it's quite awful."

"Silly! Silly!" Nancy laughed merrily—"Silly Sylvy! Now let us get to facts. What shall we have for dinner to-day?"

"What can we afford?" Sylvia drew down her mouth. "I know what I'd *like* to have."

"Don't you dare!" warned Nancy tapping Sylvia's cunning little nose with her lead pencil. "How about corned beef and cabbage—a real biled dinner?"

"Nancy, how can you? You are awfully—vulgar and dear!" Sylvia leaned over and touched Nancy's round, brown cheek with her lips. "You're such a Nancyish Nancy."

"The best of my plan is," Nancy went on, "the things are all in the house. Uncle Silas brought the meat up last evening and there are cabbages and carrots and potatoes and—and—and—"

"Water," suggested Sylvia.

"Yes. Water and fire in the kitchen. Sylvia, let us be above mere groveling. Let's put the mess in the pot, set the table and have everything ready and then sally forth to view the scenes of nature and incidentally bargain for things for the rest of the week. Buying in small quantities—" Nancy took on a look of superhuman wisdom, "is folly. All the leading articles in the journals say so; not to mention Mrs. Rorer on the subject. I'm going to lay in—hoards."

"Oh!" shuddered Sylvia, "I do so hate—hoards! You'll have the same thing every day."

"Don't you believe it! I'm nothing if not original. To-day—biled dinner! To-morrow—Glorified Hash—croquettes! Next day a bran new piece of meat in the form of—fish! We'll arrange for them to-day. As for vegetables we'll stock up and then you and I will

—give our souls a chance to grow!" Nancy grinned impishly. "I never knew you had a soul before, Sylvy, dear. In town you were like a creature in the fashion book where you have to look on the last page to find how the back of you fits the front. *Now,* you are real interesting."

"Thank you, Nancy."

"Welcome, child! And now listen, dear. Will you go down across the meadow, follow the brook through the woods until you come to the house of a man—Jim Naylor, by name, who peddles fish, and ask him to peddle some up here day after to-morrow? Strike a hard bargain with him and tell him we'll take little fishes for our little dishes once a week. Permanents always count—transients—never!"

"Can't we go together?" Sylvia asked.

"No, you tend to the live stock, I'll round up the green stuff. We'll both be back at noon; dinner at one will be in order. I mean to get some fun out of this week. After to-day you and I can do as we jolly well please and set an example. Hustle, Sylvy! I'll build up the fire if you haul the food materials to the kitchen."

"I just wish we could go together on the hunt," Sylvia persisted. "We'd have no end of fun and adventure—besides I'm afraid to go alone!"

"Fie! fie!" Nancy was on her way to the house.

"It's not proper to have adventures and there's nothing to hurt you in the woods but mosquitoes—take along some oil of penny royal. Besides after to-day you and I will be able to—have a perfectly gorgeous romp and I have some plans."

So the vegetables were prepared and placed over a "slow fire"—there was coal for such emergencies as this and everything was left in order for the noonday meal. The big pot would steam and bubble safely and when everything was arranged the two girls parted to do their tasks.

Nancy went down to the village to consult Pa Temple as to wholesale prices for provisions and Sylvia took to the stream side to find the house of "a man—Jim Naylor"—and contract for fish once a week.

"It's pretty tame work after Nan," Sylvia whispered to herself as she wandered on alone;

"and besides how am I to know Jim Naylor's house? I suppose there are other houses between this and—and—the place where the brook runs into the ocean." Then she went along singing happily to herself. Sylvia never used to sing in the old days except at her singing lesson or for company; and now she sang as the birds sang—because she could not help it. And it was always, in these days, the dear Camp songs.

"Better run away, better run away,
Pretty little maiden, run away,
When the woods are black as night—"

Sylvia had entered the forest by now.

"That's the Boo-ga-man's delight,
Better run away, better run away!"

There is nothing more fascinating than following a river or brook upon its course. The lure of the road is great, but the uncertainty about the winding of a pretty stream is charming. Sylvia tripped along sometimes jumping from stone to stone where the stream was shallow, quite losing sight of which side of the brook she was and never thinking to consider

that Jim Naylor's house might be on the "other side." The spirit of the open was upon her; she had never been so well and care free in her life. Nonsense and frivolity seemed to have slipped from her and she was "one nice little girl," as Nancy was at that very moment thinking.

As she climbed over a fallen log and mounted a little hill, Sylvia was thinking of a letter she had received from her Grandfather the night before—it was a letter to make her sing a bit more gladly now.

"Little Granddaughter:

"I have sometimes feared that I who love you most in all the world might be the cause of making you less than you should be—I and the money! You see when a foolish old man has a dear little helpless, motherless and fatherless girl on his hands, he tries to make up to her for what she has lost and sometimes he makes a mistake. Now that the danger is over I will tell you that a time back I feared I had lost my little girl in a nondescript kind of creature, half child, half woman, but Miss Rose with her tact and helpfulness has saved

the day. She tells me that you are happy and —'fit in beautifully'—you will see the 'better part,' my dear child, and come home to teach your old Grandfather a lesson in common sense.

"Judge Conly and I are having a real old-boy time and he has told me a good deal about that brave little stenographer of his. Make friends with her. She is a worth while girl and my dear, be the girl and woman your mother would have made of you; I'd hate to have her blame me by and by for spoiling a perfectly good baby!"

Sylvia's eyes grew dim—happily dim—as she recalled the letter and sang away.

"I'm going to be—better!" she whispered. "It's living and working with such girls that helps. You see yourself just as you see the outside of yourself in one of those many-sided mirrors. Nancy laughs at me and sniffs at money; Joy imitates me and makes me ashamed of myself—Jane just lifts me up beside her and dear old Meg—gets down beside me and cheers me; Miss Rose is—"

And then "Better run away, pretty maiden;"

ceased suddenly for Sylvia had come upon a small house and garden by the stream side, and she concluded that she had reached Jim Naylor's.

Up she went right bravely to the door and knocked timidly. No answer came. The house was ramshackle and down at the heel, but, the garden was nice and there was a fine view. Sylvia took the view in and then knocked again at the kitchen door.

"Oh! come off, where's your night key? Run in and stop your racket! What you trying to do—disturb nature?"

Evidently Jim Naylor was a "character." Sylvia was getting used to characters since Uncle Silas had explained *himself*. Half afraid, but seeking to live up to her name, The Dauntless lifted the latch and walked in.

The big sunny kitchen rather dazzled her for a moment, for the quiet and dimness of the woods were still upon her.

"Great jumping Toads!" And then Sylvia sprang back.

Beside a broad table by the window stood a tall handsome fellow with an enormous and very much spattered apron tied around him.

He was elbow deep in flour and dough and around him and on the stove were evidences of his culinary art.

"Piping Simmons!" ejaculated the cook. "Flying fishes!"

This last recalled amazed Sylvia to her senses. Open-eyed and half terrified; half amused, she asked faintly:

"Are—are—you—Jim?" The last name for the life of her she could not recall.

"I—sure am! Otherwise known as Jago."

"Jago—that doesn't sound like the name Nancy said."

"Then Nancy was all off. Jago is correct."

"You—you—have fish?"

"Occasionally." The cook had completed his last loaf of bread and was struggling with the button of the big apron.

"Could you—peddle some up to us once a week?"

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed the big fellow, red in the face and making noble efforts to get the apron over his head since the button clung to the buttonhole like grim death.

"Could—I help you out of the—the apron?"

Sylvia shyly offered—"girls are—are quicker about such things."

"Get me out of this mess," said the young fellow coming toward her; "and I'll consider about peddling fish and any other confounded thing you want."

"There!" Sylvia set him free and they faced each other with laughing eyes. Jago was certainly a good looking fellow—Sylvia was going to think "for one of his class," but she smothered the think.

"Now what kind of fish do you want me to peddle and to where do you want it peddled?"

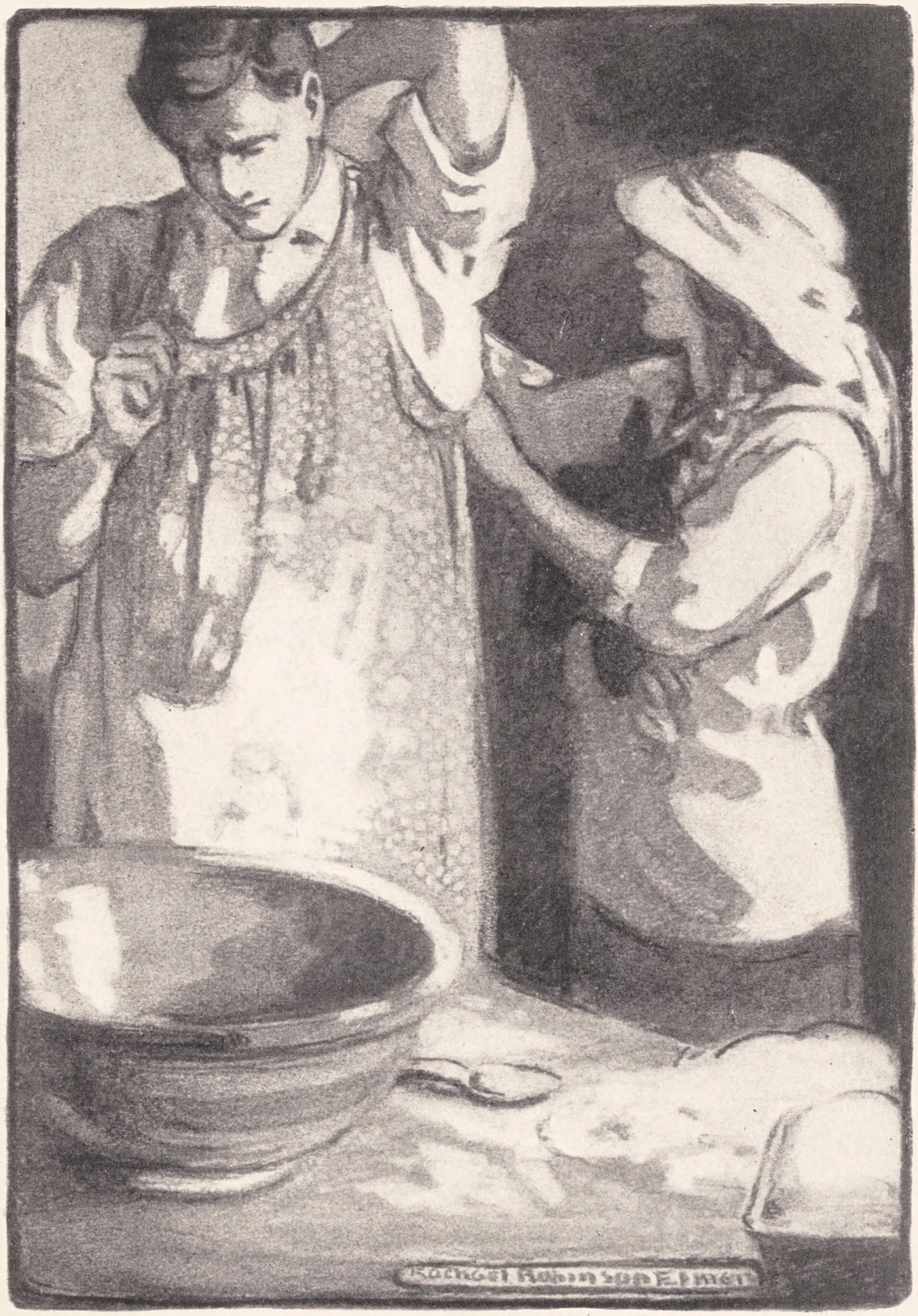
This was coming to business with a vengeance. It sobered Sylvia at once.

"Well, I do not think we care what kind so long as it is fish. We want it once a week; we're permanenters, not transients, and we're very fond of fish—all kinds."

Jim was superhumanly grave.

"May I ask—the name and place?"

"Well—Miss Rose Fay is the—the head of the house, but we girls take weeks-about-turn. Nancy and I are providing this week—we're living on the hill—in a little gray house—we're summering—a kind of camp—we call it Camp Brave Pine."



CAN I HELP YOU WITH THE—
THE APRON? SYLVIA OFFERED

And now Jim sat down upon a wooden chair and mopped his brow with his still-be-floured hand. The gesture left a sticky paste in his hair. Again Sylvia had an insane desire to laugh, but propriety restrained her.

"Well Miss—" Jim paused.

"Dean," Sylvia supplied.

"Well, Miss Dean, I'll try to get fish to you once a week if I have to—have to travel up or down to Boston to get it."

"Oh, please do not take so much trouble. I am sure Nancy thought you caught fish right in the brook without the slightest effort—besides don't you peddle for—for—a profession?"

At this human nature gave way and Jim roared lustily, throwing back his big handsome head until it knocked against the wall merrily. Sylvia was appalled and shrank back and out to the porch.

"Forgive me!" exclaimed Jim, presently wiping his eyes and thus making more sticky marks on his features. He looked so comical and Sylvia was so nervous that from sheer inability to control herself she joined in the laugh.

"Please pardon me!" said Jim; "but I was thinking of—"

"Of what?" Sylvia tried to look dignified.

"Oh! great Scots! Of old Woe, Sporty and Goo!"

"Who?"

And then Sylvia went off into another peal for this sounded like poetry.

"My—partners. The other peddlers—Woe, Sporty and Goo."

"They—are they dogs?" ventured Sylvia and again came Jim's lusty guffaw and the head knocking against the wall.

"Dogs! Oh! by ye flying fishes!"

By this time Sylvia had herself in hand. She began to think that Jim was crazy and a fear entered her mind. She was far from help and she was tired.

"Good-by!" she cried suddenly. "Do you know where to come—with your fish?"

"Sure thing, Miss Dean, and you'll have your fish. I may bring my dogs to see you, too. They're thoroughbreds—they are fine fishers. Good morning!"

Sylvia fled from the house and never stopped to look back until the sound of Jim's laughter

had ceased; then she sat down upon a log and wiped her perspiring face.

"I've had—an adventure!" she whispered over and over, "a real live adventure! But my goodness! many of them would end me in a sanatorium. What an awful creature he was. So impolite and—and noisy. I hate that sort of fellow—but he wasn't bad looking; only wild and flighty."

CHAPTER VII

THE KNIGHTS GO FISHING

THE Knights of the Round Table had finished their evening meal, cleared away the few scattered remnants that had been used as missiles, and now sat around the board under the hanging lamp and enjoyed themselves after their individual tastes.

Jimmy Nichols with a twinkle in his eyes and a suggestion of laugh in his big, boyish voice tilted his chair back, clasped his hands behind his head and ruminated.

The Knight of the Woeful Countenance, Tom Olney in real life—Woe for brevity—leaned with his arms upon the table, reading, or trying to read, a manuscript spread out before him.

Tod Nilson—better known as Sporty—sat in the only rocker the room afforded, in front of the open fire with his faithful dog Danny resting at his feet.

Paul Thornton—Iagoo—Goo for private

use, lay full length upon a home made couch on the far side of the room and emitted a groan now and again, which no one appeared to notice.

Outside, the rain poured dismally and an occasional gust of wind shook the ramshackle house.

"Woe!" cried Jago suddenly, "did you put anything under that leak in the roof upstairs?"

"I did," Woe replied looking up from his reading, "I put Sport's bed under it!"

"Thunder!" ejaculated Sporty rushing from the room with Danny at his heels barking as if his life depended upon it.

"This fire," Woe remarked after Sporty had disappeared, "has a nasty disagreeable temper. It spits and flares out disgracefully. Jago, I fear you did not live worthily to-day, while you were in command. The dinner was high art, but the firewood was gathered, methinks, from the bottom of the brook."

But Jago paid no heed and Woe turned again to his written pages which were the latest effusion of Goo, the boaster and story teller, of the Round Table Camp.

Presently Sport came back and took his seat by the fire.

"When Woe jokes," he murmured gently, "he lies. When I joke I deal with reality. Woe's bed now receives the gentle rain from heaven upon its immaculate spread."

"Gee!" Woe sprang from his seat, scattering the precious sheets right and left upon the floor. "If I could not be original, Sport, I'd remain stupid." A moment later a thundering noise overhead made known the fact that Sport's joke was being repaired to the best of Woe's ability.

Goo, tragically picked up his wide spread manuscript and growled as he did so, "Nice way to treat a fellow's best work!"

"Goo," Jago solemnly proclaimed, "if your thoughts are spread as rapidly as that in the future you'll score a success. What's the line you've taken in this here bust of fancy?"

Sporty roared with mirthless laughter and Woe just then returning remarked quietly:

"He's all right! The yarn's all right, too. Real affecting and hair raising. I say, Woe, let's have a little of it aloud."

"How about the gentle rain from heaven?" Jago asked.

"I've opened an umbrella under it."

"Great jumping frogs!" and with this Jago tore upstairs.

When he came back he relieved every one by saying that he had stuffed Sport's dress suit in the hole of the roof and that would probably keep out the wettest of the rain.

The high moral standing of the boys was exemplified by the belief they had in one another. Sporty ejaculated "Great Mars!" and again fled with Danny baying at his heels.

"You're a nice one!" he said to Jago when once more he entered the room; "do you know what you *did* put in that darned hole?"

"It wasn't darned—it was a plain hole," Jago flung back.

"Well, it wasn't my dress suit," Sporty laughed, sinking into his seat, "it was Goo's mackintosh."

"You can't feaze me," Goo jeeringly retorted, "and if it is, the punishment will fit the crime. My macky is not rainproof—it's a linen duster coated with gum!"

"Anyway," Woe said, "the rain's letting up and a good thing! A few days of this and I'd chuck it. Cooking for this crowd and satisfying your critical tastes is bad enough without rain. Fellows, this is Tuesday!"

"You don't mean it!" Jago sniffed. "What do you think we thought it was—Sunday?"

"I forgot to tell you," he suddenly added, "we've got to get a mess of fish by to-morrow if we have to go to Marblehead to get 'em!"

"What's up?" asked Goo; "beginning to feel the need of brain food, Jago?"

"And we've got to make believe peddle them, too," Jago went on without noticing the insinuation. At this the company stood "at attention." Something was doing! It took Jago to lead one to adventure. "You know that camp of girls up on the hill two miles above The Corners?"

Interest became tense.

"One of them was over here yesterday and ordered a mess of fish for every Wednesday from now on."

"What do they take us for?" Sporty indignantly asked.

"Jimmy, a fishmonger, and some dogs!" Jago replied calmly.

The boys were crowded close together now at Jago's side of the table.

"Come on!" said Woe, "what you giving us and why didn't you give it to us before?"

Jago flung his head back and laughed.

"It was 'on me' too thick yesterday, and I had to digest it. Ever since we sent that hamper up to the hill with grub, thinking there was a 'Fresh Air Party' camping out, I've felt pretty sore. The loss of the hamper —it was a perfectly good one, was bad enough, but the knowledge that the party wasn't a charity fresh airer, has eaten into my vitals. I've rather hoped we'd steer clear of the lot; but Fate has decreed that our paths cross— one of the crowd actually—" Jago paused— "caught me bread-making yesterday! Dough to right and left of me. Dough underfoot and on top of me. Dough in my hair, dough in my eyes, and Goo's mother's gingham nightmare covering my person!"

"Great Scots!" breathed Woe in genuine sympathy. "What did she do?"

"Unbuttoned it—the nightmare! Extricated me from the thraldom of service— set me free! Made a man of me again!"

The three listeners danced around in a delirium of mirth.

"We do not want girls in this wild summer —but it looks, Jago, as if they were to be

forced upon us." Sporty, in an access of excitement, was putting Danny through his paces.

"Bow to the ladies, Dan! Now, shake hands! Speak! Be dead dog! Shoulder—"

"Shut up, Sport! What did the invader do, Jago? How did she look?" Goo had forgotten his precious manuscript.

"A light, slight, trifle." Jago looked reminiscent. "Fluffy hair, and freckled nose. Brown skirt and white waist; big, flappy hat, and a Lady Clara-Vere-de-Vere air! A princess in the rough! A society bubble trying to make good."

"*Good night,* Danny—By-by!"

"And she—wants—fish? This goddess of the freckles and fluff?" Goo was hanging on Jago's words.

"She does!" And then Jago went on with the story from start to finish, "and here's my plan or plot," he went on. "That little kid doubtless took me for the old guy, Jim Naylor, down the brook. Now if Naylor can catch fish, why not we? What Naylor has done, the Knights of the Round Table can do. We'll go to Naylor this evening and wrench

his secret from him, we'll get fish or die. What are knights for but to succor maidens in distress? If those girls on the hill want fish once a week, it's up to us to feed them on little fishes. What are we here for but to do and dare—besides there may be some fun looming ahead, and I don't know how you all feel, but I was beginning to realize that a one-sex vacation is not what it is cracked up to be. A fellow with a good mother and sisters—not to mention a peach of a grandmother, knows the value of girls."

"Here! here!" came in a chorus.

"But where do the dogs come in, Jago?" Goo asked.

"Well, not to put too fine a point upon it," Jago replied, "you all are the dogs."

"Oh! flip him one on the left ear, Goo!" Sporty cried.

"I mentioned your names. Goo, Sporty and Woe, and she thought they sounded doggy. We'll go up in a body with the fish and dispel the dream. The reality may be shocking, but we'll see. Now, who's for Jim Naylor's?"

Every one including Danny was ready. Rubber boots and oil coats and hats were brought forth and in five minutes four tall, broad-shouldered fellows were plowing their way through the mud to the home of Jim Naylor.

And while all this was going on, at the Camp Brave Pine the girls were having a ceremonial evening. The rain prevented an outdoor fire but the dampness and coolness made the living room fire very welcome. Mary and Sally were present, and every one was in full regalia.

Fortunately the extra supply of suits that Miss Rose had brought along had served to supply the need of Sally and Mary.

The room was dark, but for the freshly lighted fire when the members entered. Candles were to be used and tall white ones in old brass candlesticks stood on the table. Around these candles the girls formed a circle. Then Miss Rose lighted a taper and handed it to Sylvia.

"Make, *work,* shine for us, dear," she said; "you have made such good progress in that."

Sylvia flushed prettily through her tan as

she stepped from the circle and lighted the tall candle, repeating as she did so:

"Wohelo means work.
We glorify work because through work we are free.
We work to win, to conquer, to be masters.
We work for the joy of working and because we are free."

And then Jane took the taper and lighted the second candle. Her little face was quite grave, but color and roundness had touched her cheeks.

"I light the light of Health, for Wohelo means health. We hold on to health, because through health we serve and are happy. In caring for the health and beauty of our persons, we are caring for the very shrine of the Great Spirit."

And then Margaret took the taper. Her sweet, good face beamed under the band of beads, which encircled her head; her long dark hair hung free and her kind voice had a real thrill in it, as she said:

"Wohelo means Love.
We love for love is life and light and joy and sweetness.
And love is comradeship and motherhood and fatherhood and all dear kinship.
Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten."

The third candle burst into a flame so strong and high that every eye was upon it—all but the eyes of Sylvia and Sally Temple. They were looking into each other's! Sally never could keep her gaze long from Sylvia's face when they were together and yet neither liking nor sympathy held them.

With the candles casting their small beams from the table, on which stood some good home made cakes and pitchers of lemonade, the girls turned to the open fire which by now was a red homy affair without a vestige of the ill-temper that was displayed by another fire not far away!

Roll was called and each girl responded promptly and joyously, as she crouched on the hearth. Then they told of deeds performed that would bring honor beads. Mary had learned a long poem and was in ecstasies for her memory was her weak point and she was strengthening it day by day.

"While I work, if I ain't singing," she explained, "I am learning things. I found this in an old book in the minister's study. He lets me go there to hunt for pieces and books and I dust the room to pay him."

"Why, Mary," exclaimed Miss Rose, "you are going ahead by leaps and bounds. And what is the poem, dear?"

In her Indian dress poor, plain, little Mary was really picturesque, and her face was becoming serious, thoughtful and happy. The moody look was rarely seen now and she was proud of her nicely brushed hair and well-kept nails. She had learned that her body was the "very shrine of the Great Spirit," and, with all her might and main, she was trying to make it worthy. With clasped hands and face upturned to Miss Rose, Mary repeated:

"Say not the struggle nought availeth
The labor and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

"If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And but for you, possess the field."

"I haven't learned the other verses well enough to say them to-night, Hiatini, but I'm going to! And I know what it means—" the girl's eyes shone. "It just means that no

one dares to stop fighting, for he might be making others lose the battle. The minister is going to preach a sermon about it Sunday. He speaks real beautiful about it."

"We'll go in a body!" said Miss Rose. "I'd like to hear that sermon, and really we've been rather lazy about going to church. The people need us and we need them. Sally—and by the way, girls, we must decide upon names for our new members to-night—Sally, what have you brought to the Council Fire?"

Sally blushed crimson, and her eyes sought Nancy's for courage.

"Something of my own!" she faltered; "something I made up."

"Lovely," cried Jane. "This *is* a treat."

Nancy put her hand out and laid it upon Sally's. The comfort from the strong clasp gave Sally strength and, very quietly, she recited:

"The camp fire is so dear to me!
It teaches me to play and work,
To see the brightest side of life,
To do my duty and never shirk,
To seek for beauty and give my best,
To pursue knowledge all my days,

To be trustworthy and hold to health
And glorify work in all ways.

"Last but not least, to be happy,
And make others happy, too,
To be cheerful, kind and loving,
And be happy through and through.
The most sacred of all is the symbol
Of the fire in days of old,
How it protected my pilgrim fathers
From bitter death and cold." *

Sally paused and dropped her eyes. A silence followed, for every girl was thinking —about Sally.

"Pa—he—he was real pleased with the poem." Sally felt the weight of the silence. "He knows I am trying. Ma gets discouraged with me. I don't act like I was made over, she says, and I ain't, but I am trying, and this camp does mean them things I have written—way down in the best of me!"

"Why, dear child!" said Miss Rose, "you have brought us a great help to-night. I can hardly tell you how deeply I feel about it."

"And some day," Nancy broke in, "Sally's going to thunder down the Hall of Fame as

* A real Camp Fire Girl's verses.

a writer. I feel the divine spark in her. I see it just flaming into glory. Sally, in the day of your victory—claim me as your discoverer and friend!"

Nancy always touched the happy chord and a gay laugh set every one at ease.

"Swift Foot!"

Margaret arose in her slow fashion and looked around at the bright faces.

"I know you will laugh," she said, "and I hope you will, but I borrowed Nancy's—Silas-Junior-suit and, by the dark of the moon, I've been practicing jumping and running—I can scale two bars of the meadow fence without touching a splinter!"

"And no earthly eye to witness?" Nancy asked.

"Not an eye! I am growing limber and supple," Margaret expanded her chest; "getting rapid in my movements will follow later." She gave her dear smile. "I think my head was tired before I came, I *thought* slow and now—why now my wits are nimble, *almost* as nimble as Nancy's."

Miss Rose reached out a sympathetic hand. She loved all her girls, but the patient, sweet

Margaret was nearer than all the others. She knew the laborious thought that was given to the widowed mother and little brothers and sisters; she knew the foregone hope of college, when the money vanished upon the father's death; she knew the hours of sewing and the teaching of the younger children, while the brave, gentle spirit never flagged, but cheerfully assumed burden after burden. This hard-won vacation had only been accepted because the rest of the family had had the opportunity of taking a cottage, lent to them by an old friend of Mrs. Lee, at the ocean.

"How can we keep house down there without Margaret to plan for us?" the mother had asked, but Miss Rose pleaded for a few months' change for Margaret, and it had been granted.

"Swift Foot, tired wits make heavy feet, but a light heart makes every one of us love you and honor you."

There were tears in Miss Rose's eyes.

A war whoop filled the dim room and Joy Deering, of all people, leaned forward and put a nice smelly pine log on the fire without being asked to do so.

"Singing Cricket!" Jane stood up.

"I am going to sing a song, but before that I am going to tell you a secret. One day when I was learning to make cookies down at Mrs. Allen's, the minister came in, Mr. Fleming, you know, and he said that he wanted some young girls to sing in his choir—he was going to train them. He urged me to join; he said the village girls would be glad to have me. I've been twice—I told you all I was going for a walk and wanted to be alone, but I went there and—next Sunday I am going to sing right up before the congregation!"

"Cricket! you bold, bad, deceitful thing!" Nancy was genuinely surprised.

"To think of the Crick standing up in meeting and airing a bran new talent."

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried Miss Rose, "and Mr. Fleming is some how getting into the mechanism of our summer. I have not met him. Is he nice?"

"Middling—everything," Nancy vouchsafed, "except in appetite. Mrs. Allen says the woman that cooks for him is fierce with victuals and so he comes there to be fed up. He's middling good looking, middling young;

likewise, middling old, middling tall, fat and jolly. Mrs. Allen says he has a practical nature or something exciting, but if he has I bet it is only middling thrilling. Go on, Crick! We wait to hear you trill."

One thing was now very noticeable with the girls. They were absolutely free and unconscious with each other. Jokes and gibes were given and taken and a happy comradeship held them.

"It's the first hymn for Sunday," Jane explained and then very sweetly and with a tender tone in her faint little soprano voice, she sang:

"Unto our heavenly Father
We will not fear to pray
For little deeds and longings
That fill our every day;
And when we dare not whisper
A want that lieth dim
We say 'Our Father knoweth,'
And leave it all to him."

No one spoke when Jane sat down. The fire burned a bit brighter; the rain outside seemed to pause and listen, for little Jane Trevor had put much feeling in the words.

"I—I should never have dreamed of singing," she said quietly, when the silence began to make her uncomfortable, "but you cannot imagine how I am beginning to love it. The more you sing *out*, the better you feel inside."

Even Nancy forbore a jest; she was humming to herself:

"And when we dare not whisper
A want that lieth low."

"It's like our own dear hymn:

" 'Wash pure my heart and cleanse for me
My heart's desire,' "

half whispered Joy Deering.

"My!" Nancy Temple explained: "Ain't these meetings grand? And I'm going to sing in the choir, too. I work so fast and do such a lot now that Ma says I can afford to be real giddy. I'm going to have a new dress, likewise."

"The Dauntless!" Miss Rose looked at Sylvia who was brooding with her eyes fixed upon the fire. Without looking up Sylvia spoke slowly.

"I've had an experience; an adventure!"

"Impossible," Nancy broke in. "I could

no more think of your having an adventure, Sylvy, than I could think of you with tangles in your hair."

"All the same I've had one and—after a day or so I'll tell you all about it. Hiatini, may I be excused to-night?"

Miss Rose saw that there was something back of this request, but she was a very wise Guardian of the Fire, and she merely nodded pleasantly.

"I can trust you," she said, "there is only rich cream in the well of my summer. If the Dauntless one has had an adventure I am sure it was a jolly, harmless one and we can wait."

Sally's eyes were upon Sylvia.

"I bet *I* know," she broke in mysteriously. And before any one could interfere she said impishly: "Fish! They came down to the store!"

"Stop!" Sylvia commanded in a tone no one had ever heard her use before.

"I don't care!" Sally tossed back, "Pa said he hadn't any but—canned ones!"

"Stop!" Again Sylvia's voice rose angrily. Sally laughed and made a "mouth" at Sylvia. "I know who the tall one meant when he said—"

At this Sylvia sprang up and rushed over to Sally. She took the girl by the shoulders and again cried:

"Stop!"

This time Sally heeded. With a laugh she shook herself free and tossed her head airily.

"I'm not afraid of you," she muttered.

Miss Rose was so surprised at this outbreak that she could not speak. She had long felt the antagonism between Sylvia and Sally, but she had hoped it would smooth down as so many rough edges had during the past days in the camp.

"If only something vital would draw them together," she had thought, but now she feared something vital had driven them apart and Sylvia's adventure troubled her, too, with Sally's light thrown upon it. However, she held her peace and decided to wait for Sylvia's own confession. Sylvia might be a bit snobbish but she had a sweet nature underneath, Miss Rose felt sure, and every time Miss Rose thought of the noble old Grandfather who was trying to be parents and friend to the young girl, she believed that everything would come out right.

"Now that the storm is over—" Nancy had tactfully gone to the window and looked out, "we'll proceed."

"The Nameless!" Miss Rose said calmly.

"Well?" Nancy came back to the group. "My soul yearned for service and I've found it! I went down to Mr. Temple's the other day to get his opinion about buying potatoes and garden truck—you see how local my speech is becoming—and Mr. Temple sent me to Widder Thorne's place down Compton Way."

Nancy was a perfect mimic and her voice and face now were comical to the last degree.

"I went and found the Widder Thorne."

"Lands!" Sally interrupted—"ain't she one fearful old woman, though?"

"I should think she would be fearful," Nancy replied. "I guess if any of us had had every earthly thing snatched away from us but garden truck we'd be fearful! Three husbands, ten children, not to mention parents and sisters and things—all swept away by one disease after another. While we talked vegetables she went into particulars. 'Nothing left but garden sass,' she moaned, 'and my eye

sight so bad I can't see to read or knit or anything!' Well, I'm going to buy table stuff from her and you all better, too, when you run the house, but beside that I've formed a club for her! So far there's only Mrs. Thorn, Mercy Flanders and me, but the membership isn't limited—I'm going to cheer that poor old soul up or know the reason why. I'm going to read aloud to her and Mercy every Saturday afternoon—we're going to call ourselves —The Corner Club—and we'll make good, see if we don't!"

"I'd like to join!" Jane cried. "Please let me, Nan; I know the club will be stunning."

"And me! And me!"

"And, oh! Nan, let's take box lunches and have tea on the piazza," Margaret added.

"There ain't no piaz!" Nancy shook her head.

"Well, on the grass then, or in her parlor, anywhere! Let us make it—a party!"

There was a little more merry talking and planning and then came the refreshments, the evening hymn, and the extinguishing of the fire.

The storm had passed and outside the night

was clearing. Already the stars shone over the Brave Pine. In a body, the girls and Miss Rose escorted Mary and Sally to the edge of the meadow over which they could run to the Allen place, where Sally was to remain with Mary.

"But before you go, girls," Miss Rose said, standing with her group gathered close, "can we not find names for Sally and Mary?"

A silence fell. It was a confused silence. Every girl felt that Sylvia wanted to say something disagreeable to Sally and even Nancy's keen wits were clogged. Just then an owl hooted "whoo—whoo!"

"I declare," Miss Rose said, "you know the Indians always got their names by inspiration —who'd like to be—Owl?"

"I'd just love to be!" Mary replied quickly.

"I'm going to try and be wise and—and—"

"Up late?" Miss Rose suggested.

"I'm going to be—the Owl," Mary was dancing about gleefully. "The Owl—isn't it grand, and no one must know how I got the name."

"Ooh!" Sylvia suddenly cried, "here's a worm on my hand!"

"But you're already named!" Nancy hastily broke in, thus diverting a disaster, for even Sally saw the suggestion. "And, oh! Sally, how would you like to be The Scribbler?"

"But—I don't scribble!" Sally was indignant. Her ambition was so sacred to her that to name it thus seemed cruel.

"But every great writer calls himself that," Nancy comforted. "It's a joke. It hides the real thing!" Sally finally consented, not because she was convinced, but her admiration for Nancy knew no bounds and had Nancy suggested calling her Beelzebub she would have accepted in the end.

Little Jane crept to Sylvia's wigwam late that night, and paused by the door to listen.

"Who's there?" came in Sylvia's most trembling voice, "and what do you want?"

Then Jane went in and cuddled down upon the narrow bed, close to Sylvia.

"What makes you hate Sally so?" she whispered. "We all feel it and I know that it makes Miss Rose real sad."

"She makes me crawl!" Sylvia confided. "I wish she didn't belong with us—she's like the—the—serpent in Eden or something like that and she's—beginning to put on airs!"

"Sylvy, dear, why don't you *do* something for her?"

"Do something for her? I'd like to—to pinch her!"

"But instead, if you did something awfully kind, something you did not really want to do—it might get you through Sally's crust, and down to the best of her."

Sylvia did not reply. She was thinking of her Grandfather's letter.

"I sometimes dream I'm in a place all alone with Sally," Sylvia spoke at last and with that strange thrill in her voice, "nobody ever made me feel like that before. I don't like to get so near people I do not like."

"Well, Sylvy, dear, if you ever do get into a place alone with Sally, be kind! Just think of her mother!"

"Are you mother-sick, Janey?" Kindness crept back into Sylvia's voice.

"Just a wee! You see I had a letter from Mother to-night. She's so glad I am to stay longer, and yet I can hear her calling me in every line. She is such a brave, trumpy little mother, and Sylvy, Judge Conly has sent her to investigate some charity of his, way up in

the mountains—the Adirondacks. I know it is a plot to get her away. How heavenly good people are, Sylvy, and—and please be kind, dear, to even Sally—the kindness creeps in deeper than any meanness ever does. Good-night, Sylvy girl!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE FISH

It was Wednesday and half-past ten in the morning. Miss Rose, Margaret and Joy Deering had gone to Mercy Flanders for the laundry, Nancy, Sylvia and Jane were in the arbor planning the day's meals and gossiping in jolly girl fashion.

"It looks like vegetarian diet to-day, Sylvy," remarked Nancy, as she pared potatoes, while Jane darned stockings. "The fishman hasn't materialized."

Sylvia flushed.

"Did you have an adventure that day, Syl?" Jane asked, running her needle in and out of the threads, and making a neat repair.

"Did I?" Sylvia twisted her mouth comically. "I should say I did—what's that."

All three looked down the little lane leading to the highway.

"For—good—ness—sakes!"

"It looks like the advance of Joseph and

his brethren," Nancy murmured craning her neck. "They've got something in a wheelbarrow, and there's a dog and four boys!"

"It's—" Sylvia paused for effect—"it's my adventure!"

Down went Jane's stocking basket and up bounced Nancy.

"Your—what?" she cried.

"My—adventure!" Sylvia returned calmly, as if adventures had been daily occurrences in her past life.

The oncomers were drawing near and the dog's barking was arousing the echoes.

"That's Jim Naylor with the fish and—"

"Jim Naylor? Why Sylvia Dean, you little hypocrite, that's Jim Nichols! He tutored my little brother all last winter!" whispered Nancy hoarsely.

"And," Jane was quite white, as she gasped, "that—that one with the dog is—Tod Nilson!"

At this Sylvia had her bad moment, for Tod Nilson was a friend of her own, and, as she gazed upon him in his flannel shirt, and old felt hat, her heart sank with apprehension.

"And Miss Rose away!" she half moaned; "what can we do?"

"Do!" Nancy took command. "Brave it out—act your part. Handle your adventure like the Dauntless one you are. Maybe he won't remember you—here take my apron and pull your hair up under your hat. See! the others are stopping—your adventure is coming on alone!"

With this Nancy tied the apron around poor Sylvia's waist and gave her a push forward toward the boy who was advancing up the hill with a heavy basket on his arm, while his three companions and the dog waited under a tree near the roadside.

"Scoot!" whispered Nancy to Jane and the field was free to Sylvia and her Adventure.

"Beasts!" muttered Sylvia looking after the fleeing girls. "I'll never forgive you—never!"

But the house door slammed and a condition faced Sylvia Dean.

Jago toiled up the hill, crossed the little stretch of grass and came directly to Sylvia, as she stood hot and disheveled in the arbor.

"Good morning!" said Jago, setting his basket down and wiping his perspiring brow as he took off his hat. "I've brought the—

fish. We've been up since midnight catching them—we—we caught them alive!"

Sylvia's silence was disconcerting.

"Alive!"—the girl suddenly broke in. "Alive! That sounds horribly cruel. Are they still alive?" She looked fearfully toward the basket.

"No," Jago replied with exaggerated seriousness, "and if we had had chloroform, we would have been more gentle with the creatures. As it was, we did the best we could. We used hooks—the agony was short."

Sylvia shuddered.

"What kinds are there?" she asked moving a little from the basket.

"A rare assortment—indeed every kind that came along. We didn't know how many you had to provide for." Jago looked yearningly at the shady arbor.

"Please, couldn't I sit down?" he asked; "you see my—dogs have made themselves comfortable down yonder."

At this Sylvia had to smile and she did so with a dimple in either cheek, as she moved to the shady arbor.

"Woe, Sporty and Goo—not to mention Danny, the Boston Bull—at your service."

Jago waved his hand toward his late followers. At this Sylvia glanced helplessly at the house and had the pleasure of seeing Nancy and Jane at an upper window, indulging in all sorts of monkey tricks, and dropping from sight at every turn of the fishmonger's head. At this development Sylvia became demoralized, and an insane desire to give way to laughter shook her nerves.

"There are not many of us," she said struggling with her risibles; "Hiatini, Swift Foot, Singing Cricket, Nameless and—and The Wap and me."

It was the visitor's turn to stare now. He feared this very innocent, simple-looking girl was guying him—giving names for names, and the situation began to assume more interesting aspects.

"And your—name?" he asked; "I thought it was—Dean!"

"I'm the Dauntless!" Sylvia glanced to the upper window, and at that moment Nancy was imploring high heaven for something while Jane was pointing at the fish basket with practical suggestion that it be removed from the broiling heat.

"You know we all thought when we first heard of you," Jago was saying, "that you were Fresh-airers!"

"I don't know what they are," Sylvia said truly, "but if you don't mind, will you bring those fish in here with us—the sun's so hot. Or maybe we better take them around to the cool-house."

Jago arose at once and resumed his burden. It was easier to talk with the fishmonger if Nancy and Jane were out of sight, but poor Sylvia deluded herself; her relief was short-lived. Reaching the back of the house, she and Jago entered the shed off which was the cave-like place where the ice and perishable food were kept.

"Right in here!" Sylvia said, opening the door.

"Here!" came in a whisper, close behind Sylvia, and then she knew Nancy and Jane had come downstairs, and were mimicking her from behind the kitchen window.

"What was that?" Jago asked, turning.

"An echo!" Sylvia said desperately. "I never heard such a place as this for echoes. How much do I owe—you?"

"Owe you!" came the muffled words.

At this Jago came out of the cool-house shaking with laughter.

"That echo is mighty spasmodic," he exclaimed, "and discriminating, Miss Dean—" he stood bravely in front of Sylvia; "let's own up. When we sent you that basket of—food we honestly thought you were fresh air children from town; then when you came and mistook me for Jim Naylor, you put us on the trail—we know there are a lot of girls here with—a chaperone, and we fellows want to be friendly. We're dreadfully lonely at times—and—and—the fellows, Sporty, Goo and Woe and Danny—want—to—to—be invited up."

This was too much for Sylvia; she sat down on a pile of wood which promptly fell to rolling about leaving Sylvia on the floor of the shed! "You sent that—food?" She gasped.

"We did!"

"Boys cooked—that food?"

"Yes, ma'am. And please, may I help you up?"

"Jane Trevor and Nancy Mowbray you come straight out of that kitchen!" Sylvia

demanded, "I'm not going to play fool any longer."

With this Nancy and Jane emerged, shaking with laughter, and for a few minutes the jolliest greetings were in order. Then from down the hill a long plaintive whistle came—the whistle of warning.

"You might as well call them up," said Nancy. "I dare say they are hot and thirsty."

"Yes, fish must swim!" Jago returned, giving the whistle, which, being interpreted meant "Help at hand! Friends, not enemies!"

At a bound the group under the tree made for the house and Danny dashed ahead madly.

Of course four jolly boys and three merry girls and a dog on a bright summer morning were good materials for a happy time and amid joking and explanations, they agreed to prepare dinner together, and naturally Nancy being the oldest girl, invited the willing helpers to share the prospective feast.

Jago and Woe cleaned and arranged the fish while Sporty and Goo aided the girls in the kitchen. The table was set in the cool, shady dining room and there was much bustling about and merriment.

"To think of—mere boys cooking as you can!" said Jane, raising a pitcher of creamy milk at arm's length.

"Wait until you taste these fish," Jago replied, coming into the kitchen with a platter full. "Crisp and luscious will they be."

"I hate food before and after it is on the table," cried Sporty, "here Miss—" he looked at Jane.

"Cricket, please," Jane suggested.

"Here Cricket, let us try that new side step we were learning last winter. Pipe up, Goo."

Goo, in the act of cutting bread, whistled a dance tune, while he waved the long knife, keeping time. Around and around the sunny kitchen whirled Sporty and the Cricket, while Danny darted at their heels and the others seriously looked on. The smell of the meal in preparation rose temptingly; Jago tossed the fish in the deep, boiling fat and Nancy kept her eye on the pots of vegetables. In the midst of this gay scene came a knock on the outer door and every one started and stared.

"Come in!" said Nancy, at length recovering herself, and in walked the Reverend Mr. Fleming!

For a moment an appalling hush fell upon the room. Then with that perversity of hers, Nancy broke the pause:

"Good morning, Mr. Fleming!" she said genially, "do come in and—stay to dinner."

Food and Mr. Fleming were one and the same thing to Nancy. She always associated him with the need of a good square meal.

"It certainly looks and smells tempting," said the minister, "and perhaps I can pay my way. I have come with an offering from my own garden—" he set a large basket on the table and, uncovering it, displayed several quarts of luscious strawberries.

"Oh!" Nancy exclaimed, "talk about being fed by ravens. Why that wasn't in it!"

"And—we hadn't any dessert," added Jane Trevor; "what a feast we will have. Take a chair, Mr. Fleming—"

"Unless you'd rather go in the living room," Sylvia put in thinking of the proprieties.

"No, I thank you!" The Reverend Mr. Fleming was sitting on the edge of the table swinging one of his long legs in an ecstasy of enjoyment. All the middling traits seemed to have disappeared. He looked young—more

young than old; more jolly than grave; more plain-folk than minister of the village church.

"What a sight this is for hungry heart and eyes," he was saying in an eager boyish way. "I've been hearing about you all gradually and when you—" he turned to Jane, "joined the choir I thought I ought to be neighborly. And Mrs. Thorne and Miss Flanders have been telling me about the—Saturday Club—I haven't laughed so since I came to The Corners. It's good to be with a lot of young, jolly creatures again. I suppose you fellows are from the Round Table—"

"We *are* the Round Table!" Goo broke in. "We are It!"

"Mr. Temple has been explaining the Order to me."

"Order of Fools!" Sporty explained fanning Jane with a tin pie plate.

"Every one of us has taken the diploma of Ass," added Woe, deftly turning a delicious looking mess of beans from a kettle while Jago landed his golden brown fish on a hot platter.

"If Miss Rose would *only* come," breathed Sylvia and then a long drawn out—"Well!" caused every eye to turn to the doorway

of the dimly lighted room. Miss Rose with Margaret and Joy stood on the threshold amaze and real concern on their faces.

"Has there been—a fire?" gasped Miss Rose thinking the neighbors had responded to a call for help.

"There has, ma'am. A bully one—excuse me, a hot one," replied Goo wiping his honest brow.

"Or an—an accident?" suggested Margaret looking from face to face.

"Exactly;" Jago gave his big laugh, "an accidental meeting of old friends." He looked beamingly at Nancy, Sporty, Jane and Sylvia.

"I—I thought something had happened," Joy panted.

"Something has—a dinner; it's ready!"

"And I came up to share my strawberries with you, Miss Fay;" Mr. Fleming stepped forward, "and these young people have asked me to stay to dinner. I hope you will let me. If you only knew;" he looked comically doleful, "how fearfully hungry a man can be who is half boy and half poor minister, I am sure you would be generous."

Miss Rose was herself again. Whatever might be necessary in the way of explanation for the four boys darting helpfully about, no further explanation was needed for Mr. Fleming. He was accepted and welcomed.

Surely no one had ever had a better time than he had at that dinner. Food disappeared with alarming rapidity and one good story after another brought forth cheers and clapping. Miss Rose from her end of the table glanced now and then at Mr. Fleming across the board.

"He's not even middle aged," she thought, "and he is very good looking."

It was after everything was made tidy that further explanations were indulged. Out under the pine tree every one became most friendly and intimate.

"You see," said Jago, "Sporty's father conceived the idea that we should come up here and sort of camp out while I tutored Sporty and the others. We're coming on after a fashion but all work and no play was getting on our nerves, and then—" he looked at Sylvia and grinned. "The Dauntless appeared with her fish appeal and woke us up. We interviewed

Jim Naylor and have found a real chum in him. He's taken us into business. He's to get a commission on the fish we sell—if he shows us where to get the fish. We're going to have some fun. We've been living too much alone."

"Well, your fame and the fame of Camp Brave Pine have gone abroad. Sally Temple and Mary Allen are good advance agents, not to mention Uncle Silas, Mary Flanders and Mrs. Thorne!"

Mr. Fleming was stretched upon the grass digesting his first good meal since he had dined at Mrs. Allen's. "I'll join the ranks of your rooters now. Since I've come to The Corners and been fed spasmodically by old Mrs. Gable, I am easily influenced by a touch of home life and a square meal."

"How long may we stay, Miss Fay?" asked Sporty. Miss Rose smiled.

"I'd get home, little boys, before dark," she said.

"And may we come again—if we bring fish?" Jago was balancing himself on the railing of the arbor.

"Yes, indeed—especially if you show us how to cook them," Miss Rose nodded.

"May I come to—help eat it?" Mr. Fleming arose and stretched himself luxuriously; "may I have the crumbs that fall from the rich people's table?"

Again Miss Rose nodded merrily.

"And Danny and the rest of us?" Woe remarked, "will fill in chinks, eat scraps, wash dishes, and add to the general hilarity of the occasions."

And that was the way Camp Brave Pine became acquainted with the Knights of the Round Table and good Mr. Fleming, who soon proved himself to be anything but "middling."

CHAPTER IX

ALONE WITH SALLY

"Now that we have things running smoothly," Miss Rose said one cool, bright morning in late July, "I think we ought to go on an all-day tramp. We'll take food along, have a camp-fire and cook what we can. We'll ask Mary and Sally and perhaps have a ceremonial off somewhere!"

"Delicious!" cried Margaret, "and Joy is getting so well up in wood craft that she's a regular little scout."

"Of course it wouldn't be the thing at all to ask the boys," Sylvia timidly suggested.

Miss Rose shook her head. Much as she enjoyed the new additions to the summer's life she did not want her plans to wander too far astray. She saw the great good the simple, normal life was doing the girls; she saw that among themselves there was no rivalry; nothing but happy comradeship and she wanted the good work to have full opportunity.

Lately Joy Deering had taken seriously to out-of-door sports and study. Her lackadaisical manner was fast disappearing and she was brown and sturdy. Little Jane Trevor was a close second to Joy and with the aid of Uncle Silas she had procured several good hens and roosters and was caring for them most scientifically. The other girls, too, were receiving great good from the vacation, but Miss Rose noticed that since the invasion of the Knights, the tendency to relax into formal city ways was evident.

"Let's keep to our original plans," she said gently; "the boys must rely upon themselves. We ought not interfere with their study so much and now that Mr. Fleming has joined them, they have enough to keep them occupied."

Sylvia looked pouty for an instant but at Nancy's "tut! tut! my spoiled child!" she laughed and brightened. Sylvia's moods were short-lived now. She was earnestly trying to live up to Jane Trevor who had become her ideal.

Margaret was dispatched to signal Mary Allen who, in turn, would telephone to Sally

Temple. The signaling consisted of waving a sheet from the branches of the pine tree until a response came from another sheet waved from Mary's attic window. To see Margaret climb the pine tree was a delight to Miss Rose's heart. The young body was now as supple as Nancy's. Rest and exercise had done their part and a light heart had helped. Swift Foot was no longer a joke. She was agile and confident.

While the signaling was going on the others went inside to pack baskets and make arrangements.

The signal from the pine was answered and Margaret returned to the house. In a half hour Mary presented herself, all smiles and enthusiasm, and a basket of biscuits.

"Sally can't come," she announced; "she says she has something to do this morning, something particular. I had all my work done when I saw the signal and I tell you it is great having regular stints like Miss Rose asked Ma to have for me and then doing them and being free. Why, I feel like a real business woman!" The girl laughed gleefully. "And what's more, Miss Rose," she said, "Pa is pay-



SWIFT-FOOT WAS DISPATCHED TO SIGNAL MARY ALLEN

ing me for my work, like what you suggested, and it's just grand having my own money."

Miss Rose looked at the eager face which, a time back, had been so dull and sullen.

"It ain't that I'm not willing to do my share," Mary went on; "and I often tack on little extra jobs to please Ma and Pa—things I never thought of before—but it makes you feel so good to know that your work's worth something. I wouldn't take things for nothing now for anything. I'm trying to buy my clothes out of what Pa gives and he's real surprised."

Sylvia looked very thoughtful. She was thinking of the years when she had taken and taken and taken and never thought what she was giving in return. Suddenly little Mary Allen assumed new proportions to her and she began to wonder what she could do in return for all that was given her. She glanced at Joy Deering and Joy's face was quite red. Then Sylvia knew that it was time to have a talk with Joy and see if they could not come to some conclusion. Nancy was fitting herself for private secretary work; Margaret was doing a woman's work in her home and help-

ing to keep the family together. Jane Trevor had long supported herself and assisted her little widowed mother, only Joy and Sylvia were—as Sylvia had recently called herself—show girls and, did they pay?

With much flutter and noise the party started off at nine or a little after. Joy and Sylvia brought up the rear.

"I've been thinking—" Sylvia began.

"So have I," Joy echoed.

"Don't you sometimes feel—useless? Kind of unnecessary?"

"Yes," said Joy.

"Of course Grandfather cares for me but I'm awfully selfish with him. I scarcely ever get up to have breakfast with him. I don't even keep him from being lonely. Parties at night and things all day—I do not practice my music as I should—and oh! Joy, sometimes I *do* get up early—when I want to ask for more money! I've wasted money fearfully, too. Now that I've kept accounts here, I've had hideous visions of all that I've wasted."

Joy shifted the basket she carried to her left hand.

"Cutting sodas and candy out as we do here, makes a big difference," she said. "Daddy and Mother never had any child but me; maybe they think I'm the usual kind but—after this summer," Joy raised her head bravely; "I'm going to be another kind. I'm not going to cheat Father and Mother. I'm going to be the best kind of a girl that I can be."

"What's made the difference in us?" Sylvia asked.

"I suppose it is because we've got close to each other and seen things. Why, Syl, what do you think? Meg Lee wants, actually *wants* to go to college while I've had college thrown at my head ever since I graduated from Miss Purley's. I just wouldn't go to college. I had tantrums when Daddy tried to urge it and here is dear old Meg, proudly giving up everything of her very own and never saying a word."

"Well, you cannot throw a college at Meg," Sylvia ventured. "The Lees are not that kind."

"The world's wrong then," Joy again changed the basket and her face was quite

tragic. "You and I wasting money and other girls doing without the big things that the world ought to have them have."

"My!" Sylvia took off her hat and fanned herself with it, "doesn't it make you hot to—to think?"

"No hotter than dancing in a warm room," Joy trudged ahead with chin held high; "we stand that all right. It's thinking about others and the hotness *that* causes, that we mind. Syl, why can't we somehow, make Meg get what she ought to have; what are we Camp Fire girls for anyway?"

Sylvia shook her head. The little damp, golden curls clung to her brow; there were tiny beads of perspiration on her cunning little nose that vied with the freckles.

"Who's behind us?" she asked suddenly.

"Nancy and Jane, I think," Joy replied.

"Well, I'm going to sit here and rest until they catch up. You go ahead, if you're not too hot and tell Miss Rose that we'll be there soon. I'm all fussed. What with climbing and thinking and—and carrying this load of books."

So Joy forged ahead while Sylvia sat by

the side of the path and waited. She tried not to think; she wanted to feel care free and jolly. The bright day and the thought of the happy luncheon on ahead at Bat's Cave, were unable to chase away her strange sense of something wrong. Presently she said:

"I'll walk back and find Nan and Jane."

So she walked back down the hill, calling now and again, "Hey, there, Janey and Nan!" Then she tried the *"Wo-he-lo,"* and her sweet voice started the birds who were flying from tree to tree. No answer came and by and by Sylvia began to feel lonely and a bit frightened.

"They've taken another path," she concluded. "Jane is always snooping around in the woods. She knows every trail just like a scout." At that point Sylvia came to an open space on the hillside from which she could see the meadow lying between the hill upon which she stood, and that of the Brave Pine. Not a sign of Nancy or Jane could she see—but she *did* see something else!

Some one was going up the slope leading to the little gray house. Some one who was going very quickly. Sylvia watched and

then her eyes, grown far-seeing and strong from out-door living and wide spaces, recognized Sally Temple.

"That's queer," Sylvia murmured, "she knew we were all going away for the day and she said she had something particular to do."

Then Sally went into the house. Sylvia saw her quite distinctly and sudden fear came into her heart. Suspicion and dislike gave strength to fear and without questioning further Sylvia ran down the slope and made for the little gray house on the opposite hill. Never had she been so hot or tired in her life before as she was when, breathless and panting, she emerged from the grove beside the home-place and tiptoed through the kitchen and up the stairs. Sally was above, that was evident enough. Thinking herself alone and in no danger of being disturbed the invader was giving herself full freedom.

Silently Sylvia crept up the narrow stairs and peeped through the railings of the bannisters. Sally was in Sylvia's room and bending before the trunk!

The lock was not fastened and presently Sylvia had the shock of seeing her belongings

emptied upon the floor while Sally, quiet now and trembling, handled them with a kind of reverence.

Sylvia could not speak. Anger and dislike were held in check by curiosity. She had never seen Sally look as she was looking now. The plain face was transformed—it was, in its excitement and emotion, almost beautiful. The eyes were dark and flashing; the cheeks, through their tan, quite red.

"This is her—jewel box!" Sally's voice was tense and fierce. "My! and I ain't ever had one little bit of jewelry in all my life and I'm perishing for—for just a little bosom pin. One, two, three, four, five! Five brooches besides chains and lockets and beads and rings and—and—stick pins!"

Sally was handling the things gently; "I'm —going—to—take—this--one!" A hunger rang in her voice. "I don't care if I am a —thief. She oughtn't to have everything and me nothing! Hateful thing!"

Sylvia tried to summon her courage and dash upon Sally but something held her back. She watched and waited a little longer and all her life she was glad that she did.

Sally began, slowly to take out the clothing —the pretty blue party dress so like a summer cloud.

"I'm going to—put it on!" And on it went after the coarse gingham dress was cast hastily aside. "And I'm going to—fix my hair like hers!"

Sally's stiff braids were loosened and with a certain dexterity the locks were pulled into something like grace. A gold chain was then hung around the browned neck and breathlessly Sally went over to the little mirror and posed. From where she hid, Sylvia could see the reflection in the glass and she saw a miracle! The hard, young, excited face changed suddenly into soft and winning lines: a pleading look filled the eyes. "You—you pretty thing!" There was no foolish vanity in Sally's voice, even Sylvia, palpitating and furious, was touched by the tones. "You pretty thing. Now let the prettiness inside you come out, you Sally Temple! Don't you shame this dress! What would you do, Sally Temple, if you had these nice things for your own? Would you be nasty and proud and upperty? I bet you wouldn't because you'd

know how it felt to be shabby and make-believe when all the time you were just starving for prettiness. You ain't bad looking in these things, you'd live up to them if you had them! My, don't the chain look dazzly? And how soft the silk is—people would take notice of you if you had these things, Sally Temple!"

Then another change came over the face. The joy fled and the color faded. "But you're—nothing—but—a thief!"

The struggle was on now in dead earnest. Which was it to be—a pure memory or one which Sally Temple would always look back upon with horror? Sylvia could not go forward. If Sally kept the pin then it would be time enough to confront her in order to save her from herself—for Sylvia, strange to say, wanted to save Sally! But as long as Sally could fight for herself—she must fight.

Alone in the little gray house by the Brave Pine the struggle waged.

"You are so—dear!" Sally had the pin now in the waist of the blue dress. "Some day—when they are all gone—" The expression in the reflected face made anger die in Sylvia's heart.

Yes! No! No! Yes! The foes battled while Sally stood and looked at herself in the glass. Then suddenly all the fire and joy departed. Plain little Sally with tear-filled eyes looked at a triumphant, but equally plain Sally in the mirror! Quickly the pin was taken out of the dainty dress and put in its box—then, with all the strength of battle past, Sally dropped beside Sylvia's bed and buried her head on her arm.

There were no loud sobs—the conflict had left her too weak and shamed. The summer sunlight fell upon the little heap, on the floor, in the lovely blue gown.

Then it was that Sylvia stepped softly across the hall and noiselessly into the room. In all her life Sylvia Dean had never felt so helpless nor so strong: so tender: so afraid! Her eyes and heart had been opened and her foe was before her!

Down she sank beside Sally and then it was that the victor by the bed started up with a trembling cry.

"You! You!" she gapsed.

"Oh! if Nancy Mowbray was here," faltered Sylvia, "she would know what to say.

Sally, Sally, I don't know what to say or do. I've seen everything! Every solitary thing and I think—you're the bravest girl! I know I couldn't have been so splendid. I've been mean and snitchy—oh! Sally, I'm so sorry."

Sally continued to stare.

"This is—your dress!" she said vaguely, as if that might bring about an understanding of the true situation.

"It's more yours than mine, Sally—you've earned it. I only *had* it."

"And"—Sally gulped.

"Don't! don't!" Sylvia put her hand out pleadingly, "don't! I tell you I saw every solitary thing and I think you are—the—the best ever! Just fancy wanting and never having, and then getting the chance—and finding yourself after all a nice, brave girl."

And then for some unknown reason both girls began to cry softly, almost happily.

"And—you'll never tell?" It was Sally's quivering voice.

"Never! Sally—only you and I, and the girl in that glass, will ever know. But come, Sally, change your dress quickly. Here, let me jam mine in the trunk. Now, braid your

hair, I'll button your waist. There! Now come."

"Come—where?" Sally was vaguely doing as she was bid.

"Over to Bats' Cave. Picnic—fun. Ah! Sally, hurry."

Down the stairs and out of the house they ran. Across the meadow and up the opposite hill. They did not speak to each other, every breath was precious. Sylvia found the bundle of books she had dropped on her way and on again she and Sally plunged.

It was a mile ahead that they came upon the others returning to look them up. "Why, Sally's there," cried Miss Rose, spying the girls first.

"Yes," panted Sylvia. "I stopped to wait for Nan and Jane and they did not come and then—I saw Sally across the meadow and I went back and got her. She was—she had finished what she had to do. I made her come on."

Nancy's keen eyes were upon the two. She saw that Sally was looking with strange fervor at Sylvia and she saw that frivolous Sylvia had undergone some marked change.

But Nancy's nimble tongue knew when to keep silence so she turned and retraced her steps. The others followed and the walk was resumed.

"We're all going to get something to tell on this walk," Mary Temple explained. "We ain't going to say anything until we next meet at the Fire. But each of us must find something."

Sylvia and Sally looked at each other and both knew that they had found something too deep for words. In a sense, too, they both realized that the days to come held other struggles for them. An instinctive dislike could not be overcome so suddenly. There would be doubts and aversions, but always Sylvia was to remember the face in the mirror and Sally was to recall, in her quiet hours, the words:

"You're the bravest girl. I couldn't have been so splendid."

It was one o'clock when the party reached Bats' Cave. They were hungry and tired, but never had they been so full of fun and capers. The camp fire was made and long sticks sharpened. There were chops to be

broiled and cocoa to be made; eggs to be boiled and potatoes roasted. Joy Deering had made the cake of the day and Mary had provided some delicious biscuits.

"I suppose we ought to have something left," said Nancy, eyeing the feast spread out at length upon the clean cloth, "but from the feelings I have I fear there won't be. Move over, Meg," the girls were all around the fire: "I want the flames to lick my chop."

"How did this place get its name?" Jane Trevor asked a little later when they were seated Turk-fashion at the feast.

"Bats!" said Mary with her mouth full of egg and biscuit, "bats!"

"I thought I heard a—a—stirring," Joy ventured timidly, edging off from the opening of the cave. "Are there underground passages and caverns?"

"Yop!" Mary returned; "and a kind of room up above. After lunch let's go up on top and look in."

"I—I—don't think I care to." Joy edged still farther away.

"You have to crawl in on your stomach," Sally added. "But once you get inside there's quite a big space."

"Who dares to go?" Nancy asked.

"Perhaps you better not," Miss Rose said quietly, though she acknowledged that she would rather enjoy a little investigating herself.

"There ain't anything in there but dirt and bats," Sally urged, "and we could smoke out the bats."

"Would it hurt them?" asked Sylvia.

"Sure it wouldn't hurt 'em." Mary snipped. "We'll make a little fire by the opening and the bats will fly out of the top. It's real easy. I'm not afraid. I'd as lief go in all by myself."

But Miss Rose forbade this.

"We'll start a smudge-fire," she explained, "and clear the place. I remember going in when I was a little girl. It is very interesting. It is probably a bit dirtier and perhaps there are a few more bats, but nothing to hurt us. A cave is always fascinating. You never quite know what you *will* find inside. Come, girls, bring me some wood; we'll clear the table afterward."

So the slow, smoky fire was built and an excited group of girls watched it and the space over the cave.

"The first bat you see, call out!" cried Nancy, "and then cover your heads. I don't want the wingy things to clutch my locks."

"Ooh!" shivered Sylvia. "And I suppose they'd never let go until it thundered?"

"You're thinking of crabs and toes," Margaret laughed.

"Whew! but this smoke is stifling. Here, girls, fan it in with your skirts."

The black smoke rose and rose. It filled the opening of the cave like a dense pillar.

"If any bat can stand *that* long," said Nancy, "he's the battiest bat I ever heard of. But just fancy the poor things all blind and fiendish-looking, being forced out into the daylight to get air. What's that?"

"Those wings again!" whispered Joy. "Look out, girls!"

"Heads covered!" commanded Nancy. "There's a batty thing."

So there was and another and another!

"Gee whiz!" roared one bat, "call off your smoke until we haul Jago out. He's too big for the opening, but we've got to wedge him through!"

Miss Rose and the girls stood in a horrified

ring while Sporty, Goo and Mr. Fleming lent helping hands to the other bats of their party.

"You see," explained Mr. Fleming, "when we heard you coming we did not want to force ourselves upon you so we took shelter in the cave. We didn't expect to be smoked out—we tried to choke it out but when you fanned it directly in, we knew the day was lost. Please forgive us."

Miss Rose sat down upon a rock and laughed her gay, rippling laugh.

"Here's Jago and Woe," Sporty announced, dragging the two boys to the edge of the top of the cave. "They're neither pretty, witty nor clean, but they're beastly hungry. Could we have the—leavings, ma'am?"

There was much bustling about to gather together the food and in the end a respectable meal was got together.

"We wanted to be home by one," Jago said. "Mr. Fleming was our guide here. Your coming rather set us back, and your smoke nearly ended us. Every mouthful I take is flavored with smudge."

"Well, it might be worse," said Nancy comfortingly; "there might be no mouthfuls."

"It looks as if willy, nilly, Miss Fay, we were forced upon you," Mr. Fleming added, as he lounged against a tree and munched his chicken sandwich contemplatively. "When I saw you coming I told the boys we must make ourselves scarce for you all looked as if you were bent on private and particular business."

"Oh! we never expect to own—all the landscape," Sylvia broke in. She was all smiles and ripples now. "Accidents will happen to the best-laid plans, you know."

Jago gave one of his irrepressible guffaws at this and Sylvia flushed.

"I mean only a compliment," she faltered.

"Well, now that you are here," Jane Trevor cried, as she danced about making every one comfortable as far as the scraps would go, "we might as well have a game or two and lighten the occasion. I'm rather pining, myself, for a Duck-on-the-Rock ogre."

The second luncheon was soon over and the spot cleared for action and before long the group looked like a preconceived and well-carried-out picnic party.

Duck-on-the-Rock and "Follow Your

Leader," were indulged in and then a Fox and Hound game was added. Suddenly Miss Rose said:

"I dislike making myself disagreeable, but —what—time is it?"

"Time? Time?" asked Sporty. "Time? What is Time?" He was standing on the rock near the mouth of the cave and as he spoke a low rumbling roar replied.

"Thunder!" moaned Joy. "Thunder and we are out of doors!" She looked pitifully at Miss Rose.

"I thought it was something beside time that was darkening the earth," Sporty laughingly said.

"But we are *outdoors!*" Joy repeated. "Outdoors and miles from home."

"There's the cave," Mr. Fleming suggested. He noticed Joy's pale little face and indeed it was better for all to be under cover for the darkness was coming fast; the shower was near at hand.

"Make for shelter!" ordered Jago. "The cave isn't half bad. Here, I'll take in some wood. Sporty, and you, Goo and Woe, bundle up those things and run them in. Now, then, ladies first!"

The girls and Miss Rose squeezed themselves into the opening and the boys and Mr. Fleming followed.

Once inside Joy gathered a little courage, but with the first lurid flash of lightning, she gave a shriek and hid her head in Miss Rose's lap. The outcry unnerved every one and a silence followed, while the darkness grew denser and denser.

"We'll try to build a fire," said Jago from the gloom of the far side of the cave. They heard him laying the wood and striking a match. Then came another blinding flash of lightning and a sudden crash of thunder. Joy only moaned now. The little blaze rose comfortingly and did its best, under Jago's care, to cheer the dim, shadowy cave. The smoke rose through the opening in the roof and presently a glow and warmth made them all feel better.

"Boys come in handy," said Nancy with a quiver in her voice.

"Thanks, ma'am!" Jago called out from his shadows. "And from the shade of the blackness I fancy the storm is passing. It is only a pale shade of blackness now."

Causes!" Jane hurriedly put in—"it's—for—for!" She looked helplessly at Tod.

"Nothing in the world but fun," said he, "but the money will be given to village improvement—and your name will head the list. Think how it will sound!"

"Timothy Dallas Two-fifty for town improvements!" Uncle Silas took up the cudgels, "and I reckon Andrew Smith seeing that will go you one better."

At this Silas bridled. Smith was his sworn enemy and had the adjacent farm.

"One—what?" he asked.

"One—row!" nodded Jane with a radiant and innocent smile. "One row for Mr. Dallas; two rows for Mr. Smith! Doesn't that sound public-spirited?"

"I guess if Smith can stand for two rows I can!"

"Two rows for Mr. Dallas—five dollars!" Tod was getting his tickets out. "Two rows for Mr. Smith—five dollars!"

"Ten dollars at the first!" bubbled Jane, "why the hall will be packed and by the best people! It will be such an inspiration."

"How's them tickets going to be paid for?" Dallas asked.

"In—in money!" Sylvia put in dazedly. "What's five dollars, Mr. Dallas? Five little dollars when you're thinking of your—your perfectly beautiful village?"

"When has it got to be paid?" further asked Dallas, his little eyes snapping.

"Right now!" Tod exclaimed reaching over Silas with the twenty tickets. "Here are your tickets, Mr. Dallas, and now—where is your fiver?"

What could a man do with those two pretty girls, the free and easy young man and Silas Thomas looking on?

"How do I know that Tim Smith will take five dollars' worth?" Dallas withheld his money.

"We'll come back and tell you. Perhaps he'll outbid you for public favor and—then," Tod waved the tickets—"it's up to you to—spread yourself on another row!"

Uncle Silas shook with laughter.

"Ten chances to one the play won't be worth shucks!" Dallas was unrolling some bills and skinning off a five dollar note.

"Oh! Mr. Dallas, and with us all in the meller drammer? How you do hurt our feelings." Tod exchanged tickets for money.

"I beg your pardon, ladies." Dallas looked embarrassed. "I ain't doubting but what you'll do your part. Good morning! Good morning!"

"Pretty snappy work!" Tod remarked as they drove off, "a few more sales like this and we'll have to repeat the play."

"After Tim Smith," Silas said urging the horse onward, "it will be a ticket or two here and there and slow work. Smith and Dallas are at each other's throats all the time. Both as mean as dirt, both hating to be outdone by the other. Git up! old Bone Yard" (the horse was plump and shiny), "you'll get your money's worth at Tim's!"

Timothy Smith was in his barn and Uncle Silas drove right up to the big open door.

"Well, Tim," he said, "I suppose you've heard about the play down to the Corners on the 20th. This is some of the troupe."

Smith took off his hat. He couldn't have told why, but Sylvia and Jane seemed to demand it of him.

"I saw the poster in the store," he admitted, "but I didn't take much interest. I ain't a play-going man."

"But this is different," Sylvia said smiling sweetly. "We give our services for the public good and all we ask you to do is to come and enjoy yourselves."

"Meller-drammer," put in Tod serenely; "no nerve-racking spectacle; no moving picture show—just plain meller-drammer."

Smith hadn't the slightest idea what "meller-drammer" was, but he did not want to show his ignorance.

"Dallas knows what's what." Uncle Silas gently added. "He planked down five dollars for twenty seats for meller-drammer. Shakespeare couldn't tempt him, but meller-drammer brought down his coin double quick. One who ain't seen this kind of tragedy, shouldn't miss it."

Smith plunged his hands in *his* pockets and his face had a vague, helpless expression that almost set Tod Nilson off into one of his alarming roars.

"Waal, I suppose that *is* so!" Smith remarked, his eyes shifting from one face to the other. "Most acting I hold as demoralizing and worthless; but meller-drammer has this to say for itself, it *is* meller-drammer!"

"Exactly!" Jane cried. "Oh! how well you have put it, Mr. Smith. You must be a good critic."

"Waal, I be!" Timothy grinned, "from a hoss down I *am* a good critic. I can't see, though,"—he grew thoughtful. "How Dallas could shell out five dollars even for meller-drammer; that fence of his joining—or dividing his west meadow from mine needs mending like all creation, but if Dallas can spread himself like thunderation, there ain't any sense in *me* holding back. How much be the tickets, Miss?" His eyes were upon Sylvia.

"Twenty-five cents a piece. One row of seats two-fifty; two rows of seats five-fifty!"

"Five dollars!" corrected Tod severely.

"See here, young man!" Smith ejaculated, beaming upon Sylvia: "Five-fifty it *is* if she says so! Five-fifty, Miss, and here's the cash!"

"Oh!" Sylvia clapped her hands delightedly; "and when I look down from the stage and see *you,* Mr. Smith, how I *will* act!"

"That's too easy!" Tod complained as they turned again into the road; "to bowl the old

dodger over that way, Sylvia Dean, was positively immoral."

"I never can figure!" Sylvia pouted; "I didn't mean to cheat him."

"You figure all too well," Jane laughed. "I pity your grandfather."

The rest of the sales were tame compared to the first ones. The party drove back to tell Mr. Dallas of Smith's purchase, but all Dallas remarked was:

"More fool he! But if he can afford to splurge that way he'll have his part of the fence on the west medder done quick and proper!"

When the party reached home in the early twilight, half the town hall had been bought and paid for.

"I never had so much fun before!" said Jane slipping into a cool every-day dress; "I'd like to peddle all the rest of my life."

The day following, the sales were fewer and not so uplifting. Religious prejudice was encountered and New England obstinancy.

"Be you going to have—stage setting to that play?" asked one old lady.

"Oh, yes!" Jane replied jubilantly thinking this would add to the charm.

"Well, then, I don't want nothing to do with it. I like speechifying and oratating with a few gestures, and I like plain singing and pianerforte-ing, but when it comes to *stage setting* I draw the line. That's flat-footed theater and no Christian person ought to encourage it right here in this town. It's real polluting to our young people."

"Now what do you think of that?" gasped Tod. "When we're trying to uplift the youth of the Corners!"

But the old lady drove them from her presence. Sylvia's beauty and Jane's charm could not move her. She had her "opinion of Silas Thomas," and as for Tod Nilson, "he was a downright, flat-footed scamp with his jokes and imperdence to one old enough to be his grandmother and aching to spank him."

The day dragged and only ten tickets were sold, but on the way home the Rural Free Delivery man met them and handed a soiled and damaged envelope to Sylvia. The postmark was blurred but Sylvia took no heed of that. She tore the envelope open and out dropped three, crisp, five dollar bills! "Kindly reserve three rows of seats—ten in a row—for A Friend!"

This was written on a slip of paper enfolding the bills.

"Well, did you ever!" gasped Jane.

"Perhaps it's for some one we don't want there," suggested Tod rather appalled at the sudden downpour of blessings.

"We'll put them out then," Sylvia briskly joined in.

"If they get in on false pretenses we'll—remove them."

"And give them back their money?" Jane eyed the bills ruefully.

"Not at all. They have no business to resort to underhand methods. Here, Tod, take the money and save—three rows!"

Sylvia's manner in dealing with money even yet savored of high-handed piracy—it always made Tod Nilson, who was something of a free lance himself, shudder and take heed. What he did largely, himself, held a new significance when he saw it in another. Little Jane's picturesque economics; Margaret Lee's more strenuous ones and Jim Nichols' sturdy independence were beginning to have a wholesome effect upon Sporty.

"It's great," he said, apparently apropos of

nothing, "to work out your salvation as we all are doing this summer."

Sylvia stared at him, but Jane nodded her head understandingly while her eyes looked afar over the beautiful summer landscape that she loved and which, all too soon, she knew she must leave.

The anonymous note and money caused a great excitement in the gray house that evening as the girls and Miss Rose sat around the lamp reading, working and talking.

It was such a dear home evening. The early supper was over, the windows set wide to the sweet fresh air and a good book in Miss Rose's hands. Now and then the reader would pause for discussion; sometimes to speak of something quite foreign to the story. The girls were all sewing or doing fancy work and no happier, healthier group could have been found than that Camp Fire group.

"Hear the wind in the Brave Pine," said Jane, laying her work in her lap and listening. "It seems to me I shall hear it all my life and be the better for it. When the typewriter clashes hardest, it will soothe me; when my head aches from dictation, it will calm me—I just adore it!"

"I used to feel so lonesome when I heard it," Sylvia admitted. "Many a night when we first came, I cried myself to sleep as I listened to the plaintive sound—now it makes one think."

Miss Rose lifted her eyes to Sylvia. "Dear," she said, "you have won your name. It takes a Dauntless one to stay on when she need not—and when it is bad enough to cause a tear-wet pillow. And it takes a Dauntless one to confess to such a thing and—it takes a Dauntless one to love to think!"

"It's a wonderful summer!" Sylvia bent over her work.

"I was afraid I could not stand it," Joy broke in timidly; "I was afraid and fearfully dreary as soon as the shadows fell and now—" She looked up confidently, "I'm a Happy Bird all right!"

Every one laughed.

"When the Wap uses slang," Nancy cried, "it becomes classic. As for plain folks like the Cricket, Swift Foot and your humble Nameless, this life suits us—not down to the ground, but up to the stars. Isolation is what my simple artistic nature needs; Swift Foot

has developed magnificently—note her chesty appearance and as for the Cricket—to hear her warble in the church choir is a thing never to be forgotten. She brought tears to many a hardened eye when she trilled forth last Sunday, 'Watchman, tell us of the night!' "

"It was beautiful, Jane, dear. I wonder if we could not have a verse or two now?" Miss Rose asked.

Jane went at once to the piano.

"Watchman, tell us of the Night,
Higher yet that Star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light,
Peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone
Gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own:
See! it bursts o'er all the earth."

Jane's sweet, flute-like voice rose triumphantly and then she turned suddenly on the stool and every one saw that there were tears in her bonny eyes.

"I want—" she faltered, "to see our star over the Brave Pine."

Nancy ran to her and put her arms around her.

"Let's all come," she said.

And there it was, their own bright star over the singing pine! Closer they drew together and it was Margaret Lee who spoke.

"I think what this summer has meant to us will reach out and out—when we get home. I wish it could burst over all the earth—the earth of girls and dear Miss Roses! Oh! why can they not get together, rich girls, poor girls, beggar girls and—" the eager, half-laughing voice paused.

"And thief-girls, did you forget, Meg?" It was Sylvia who spoke from the dear shelter of little Jane's embrace.

"There are no thief-girls; there could be none in any dear Camp Fire Group."

"I think they couldn't be—long," Sylvia returned. "The loveliness and helpfulness would cure them. I think I've been a mean little thief of time and Grandfather's money, but when I go home—you all will see!"

"Dear, dear Sylvy!" breathed Jane.

"Let us sing one of our beautiful songs—the blessedest of them all," Miss Rose spoke; "lead, our little Singing Cricket."

"Lay me to sleep in the sheltering flame,
O Master of the Hidden Fire.
Wash pure my heart, and cleanse for me
My soul's desire."

The song floated sweetly through the summer night and the flame-star overhead palpitated while the Brave Pine whispered. And then it was that Nancy saw Uncle Silas standing by the house door with uncovered head and clasped hands holding his broad brimmed hat.

From his day's toil on his own little farm, he had come to watch and rest, near them at night, that all might be safe and secure. How faithful he was; how patient and then Nancy wondered—what *his* story was! For every one, as Sally had taught her to believe, had a story hidden away in his heart as all houses had their stories.

"I'm going to find out some of these stories," Nancy's thoughts ran on; "they are better than all the make-believe stories in all the fairy tales."

CHAPTER XI

UNCLE SILAS' STORY

AND after all it was little Jane Trevor who found out about Uncle Silas and she did it via Mercy Flanders! Jane did not know it was a big, vital story she had and when she told it laughingly to Nancy she was surprised to see Nancy's brown eyes grow misty. It all happened this way. One day after the reading in Mrs. Thorne's parlor, when the other girls had left on their errands, Jane walked across the meadow, dividing Widow Thorne's cottage from Mercy's, with Mercy herself.

"You're coming to the play, Mercy, aren't you?" she said. Mercy did not turn her head and her sunbonnet hid her face.

"No, I ain't, Miss Jane," she said; "I don't set up to be no society woman and washing and ironing ain't the sort of job to permit one to buy society togs. I come from the best and I don't knuckle down to none, but I know the fitness of things and what's what. Be-

sides—there's something else." Her old face twitched.

The reading of the afternoon had been a Scotch story of faithful love that endured even after death had separated the lovers. All the girls had glanced guiltily at Mercy and Sally Temple had grown quite white, and that was why Jane was walking home with Mercy. Her tender heart had ached for the lonely, homely woman whose story, unknown to herself, was common property to them all. The Reading Circle had grown now until it embraced all the girls and Miss Rose and was so popular that the Knights were begging to be permitted to come on "Gentlemen's Days."

"What else, Mercy?"

"I ain't one to share my troubles, Miss Jane."

"But oh! Mercy, they are so much easier to bear. It's like the old Bible yoke, when you put it upon two—it, the burden is lighter."

"That story this afternoon," Mercy breathed hard, "joggled my feelings considerable."

"We'll have lighter, brighter things another day."

"Oh, it ain't that. I ain't against having my feelings messed with when it leaves me so tender as I be to-day."

And then Jane slipped her little brown hand and arm through Mercy's.

"Let bygones be bygones, says I," Mercy went quiveringly on, "but I don't see as one that has done a hard, bitter wrong to another has any right to go galivanting off into society and forgetting! I think the least you can do when you think you've done your duty —is to remember and fight it out alone."

"But, Mercy, don't you see the very minute you get *alone* to fight things out, you're cheating some one else of—of your helpfulness and —fighting?"

"I don't foller you!"

"Why, we girls have found that out this summer. Off there in our homes all living apart and just touching each other now and then, we could not know how each needed the other. But now we know and in all our lives we are never going to forget, and what's more we are going—" Jane paused.

"Well—our dear ceremony has said it like this:

" 'That light which was given to me,
I desire to pass undimmed to others,'

and we're going to do it, too!" There was a sweet fierceness in Jane's voice. "There are many dear brave young Nancys in the world, and brave Sylvias trying to see their paths into the better way, and funny little shams of Joys who only need companionship to make them real and splendid. Megs to teach us all unselfishness and courage and Marys and Sallys and blessed Miss Roses to help. All they need is to get together and be —humans! Oh! Mercy, you cannot be a human if you shut yourself up in your shell."

Mercy plodded ahead stoically.

"Now, Mercy, we want you to come to the play and there's to be a dance afterward and refreshments. It's going to be very jolly and get-together-ness."

"I ain't got a snitch of anything to wear."

"But Mrs. Thorne is going to buy a black lawn and Meg is going to help her make it."

"If Mis' Thorne wants to lay aside her weeds for anything so frivolous," Mercy muttered, "that's her business."

"Mercy, please let me help you to fix some-

thing. I am a dabster at making something out of nothing. I've done it ever since my Father died and if I do say it, Mother and I are as well dressed as most. You must have something, Mercy, that, with a bit of freshening up, will look beautiful. Please, Mercy!"

They were near the little three-room house now. The weekly "wash" of the Camp Brave Pine, was flapping sweet and dazzling from the lines back of the house; the scantily furnished living room was plainly seen through the open door. There were some late roses blooming in the little front yard and orderliness pervaded the tiny spot Mercy knew as home.

"If you don't mind coming in, Miss Jane," she said, "I'll show you a sprigged muslin I have. I ain't worn it since before the war but it's kept something wonderful."

Jane pressed the thin arm under her own.

"Lavender and tissue paper are great preservers," Mercy went on. "I've allas 'lowed I'd be buried in the sprigged muslin. It ain't what you might call giddy and a little toning down would make it decent. I was never one to be over particular about after-details.

But as I was thinking just now, I don't know as it would hurt the muslin to be worn once more and it ain't likely folks would remember it—the association being so different."

And now they were in the daintily clean living room; the bare, yet sweet room where Mercy lived her lonely life apart.

"You set in the rocker by the window, Miss Jane, and I'll fetch in the muslin."

Jane swayed to and fro in the big wooden rocker with its cushions of gaudy calico. She thought of Mercy's dead soldier and the long-ago tragedy and then Mercy came back. Reverently in her outstretched hands she held the sprigged muslin; the simple gown of more than half a century ago! It was older than little Jane's Mother; older than any garment Jane had ever seen and yet love and remorse and sorrow had helped lavender and paper to preserve it to this day when a little stranger-friend would find a use for it.

"How pretty it is!" Jane exclaimed, "and quite up-to-date. Why, Mercy, not long ago in one of our shops, I saw some goods very much like this—only not so dainty. I love violet on white ground. Let's try it on!"

"I ain't said I was going to do what you suggest," Mercy drew back.

"No. But I know you are because you are so—so human, Mercy!"

"I'm thinner than I was fifty-odd years ago."

"We can take in the seams, Mercy."

"And my chest has fell considerable. I'm real flat chested now. I used to be real chicken-breasted."

"I have the sweetest piece of lace," Jane was handling the muslin with the touch of an artist, "just the thing for this."

"I ain't one to accept favors, Miss Jane."

"No. But lace is different. What's a piece of lace between friends?"

"You certainly are real comical, Miss Jane," Mercy was smiling grimly; "real comical and diverting."

"Besides if you want to pay me for it you can," added Jane, "give me that cracked blue teapot you said you were going to throw away. I'm daffy over that ware. I know a man at home who can mend it and Mother will be radiant when she sees it on the plate rail. There! Mercy, I declare! The dress isn't a bad fit as it is. You look fine!"



WE CAN TAKE IN THE SEAMS, MERCY

The sprigged muslin was on the tall, thin form and Jane stood off to get the effect. Her pretty head was on one side and her eyes were full of meditation.

"A little fluff of lace here!" she touched the fallen chest, "and a bunch of purple asters! Take the skirt up a trifle and edge the bottom ruffle with narrow Val.—Sylvia has yards of it! Miss Mercy, you must let Joy Deering dress your hair the night of the play. What Joy cannot do with hair isn't worth doing. She does ours and she is a wonder."

"Fix my hair!" gasped Mercy, "no one ain't touched my head but myself for—for—"

"Well, after Joy does it once you'll never have to say *that* again. And oh! Mercy, I have a string of purple beads, I'll throw them in with the lace for that love of a teapot!"

Mercy was gazing at her reflection in the narrow mirror between the windows.

"Fine feathers!" she murmured, "do make fine birds. I meant to make this frock do me for summer Sundays even after—after something happened that I don't talk about—and once I did have it on and Silas Thomas admired it and he—he said things that made me

mad and that was the last time this muslin's seen the eyes of man! I guess, though, that Silas wouldn't remember and besides he ain't the dolt he once was. Silas, when he was young, never would see things as other folks did. He was allas one to hold to one thing and never look fore or aft—that's why he's pegging along like he is. He was never one to—get on!"

That evening as Jane and Nancy were preparing the evening meal, the conversation of the afternoon was repeated.

"She called dear old Uncle Silas a dolt!" Jane said beating the *Sally Lunn* briskly in the deep yellow dish. "And isn't it queer, Nan, to think of two really ancient people like Mercy and Uncle Silas, as young and—like us?"

Nancy came from the dining room where she had just finished setting the table. She came over and stood beside Jane, the late afternoon sun falling full upon her strong, lithe young body.

"How did Uncle Silas get mixed up with Mercy?" she asked. "Don't you mean—Sam Saunders?"

"Why, Nan, Mercy must have been a real belle, a regular 'cut-up' as Tod Nilson would say. There was Sam Saunders and she is grieving for him yet, but there was Uncle Silas too. A young Uncle Silas. An Uncle Silas who admired sprigged muslins and was a dolt!"

Then it was that the mist rose to Nancy's eyes.

"Why," she said, "*that* is Uncle Silas' story!"

"Eh?" Jane poised her long spoon in air.

"Sam Saunders' story was all wrapped away under the old flag that Mercy tore off. She only *thinks* she loved Sam Saunders—I can see it as plain as plain, and it is Uncle Silas that she has been fighting off all these years. The New England people are all like that. They are afraid to be happy and comfortable. They're afraid it is sinful. Anything that's easy is—of—of the devil!"

"Why, Nancy Mowbray!"

"That's it, Jane; you are New England yourself. Just see how shocked you are at a little free and easy speech. Be careful! you are smutching that batter all over the table!

Now, Jane, listen to me! You have the most practical soul in your body but you haven't a grain of romance; still we must use every one's talents and you make Mercy Flanders simply —stunning! I'll do the rest."

"Nancy—what are you up to?"

Jane tried to look stern as she slapped the light batter into the hot pan and dashed it into the oven.

"Just a big—adventure." Nancy's eyes were fixed out of doors—she saw the golden, mellow sunset light, the purple shadows nestling in the curves and hollows of old Lafayette Mountain; she smelt the sweet odor of new mown hay and a hermit thrush was singing somewhere in the dim woods behind the house.

"Janey, I just love what the minister preached about last Sunday—'and at even there was light!'—wouldn't it be perfectly splendid if we, just we Camp Fire girls, could help poor old Uncle Silas and Mercy Flanders to—see things?" Jane came to the window and stood beside Nancy.

"I see what you mean," she said, "but I only know things that our books tell about and —and Mercy and Uncle Silas are so old."

"Books!" Nancy tossed her head. "Books! when you have *this* to teach you." She stretched her strong young arms wide to the tender beauty of the late day. "Books! What are books after all? Just suppose—" and the low voice trailed off gently.

"Oh! me, oh, my!" shrieked Jane dashing to the stove, "my Sally Lunn! my Sally Lunn."

"Sally Lunn!" Nancy sniffed. "How can you think of Sally Lunn in the face of this great human interest?"

"Pish!" Jane retorted with some spirit, "you can't eat human interest and there isn't a loaf of bread in the house." At this Nancy came back to earth.

"Jane," she commanded, "bring the cook book and more flour, I'll repair the damage I brought about. But, incidentally, don't let's forget the possibilities near at hand. All these long years Uncle Silas and Mercy have been plodding along in the dark, just as Mr. Fleming said so many people do and now when it is evening time, just suppose they both saw things? There would be no lonely Mercy Flanders being helped by the town until her

proud soul grows bitter. No fussy, dear Uncle Silas working hard and losing spirit because he has no one to save for. There would be one nice comfy home and two new people just getting their Christmas present on New Year's day instead of the 25th of December!

"My, Janey Trevor! what a summer this has been! We all are snarled up in each others' lives and there are those funny boys down in the shack. They were just going to give up because they were so lonely. We, or Sylvia, touched their lives and now they are studying hard and loving it up here. Mr. Fleming isn't anything like as hungry, body or soul, as he was and it all came about because blessed Miss Rose had a vision that day back in June. Now then! Janey, open the oven door. I may have flighty spells, but I can slap a batch of biscuits together almost as well as Knight Jago."

Jane closed the oven door on the promising pan of light balls and came over to Nancy beside the western window again.

"I want to tell you something, Nan. I don't snoop as you know, but I have a sense

about some things and I can spy a—a possibility with the best of you. Nancy, have you noticed anything about Mr. Fleming and—and—Miss Rose?"

Nancy sat upon the edge of the table swinging her feet and as Jane spoke she grew suddenly still.

"Now, see here, Jane Trevor," she said smiling broadly, "you can't make me spoil my pan of biscuits, you little vixen! One mistake of that kind is enough for us. Mr. Fleming and Miss Rose! You sacrilegious imp! Leave such things to your betters!"

"Nancy, I'm in dead earnest."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself and you should have your ears boxed."

"I don't care what you say—I heard—"

"I never talk private affairs with menials but—Jane Trevor, what *do* you mean?"

"Well, I heard him tell her the story of his life the other day. I was reading in the arbor and they were there too. Mr. Fleming did not think I counted so he went right on. He's had a pretty plucky life, if I do say so. Worked his way through college; waited on table while his inferiors ate. He didn't say

that but Miss Rose did and her eyes were shining. And then he said that he chose the ministry because it seemed the best way to help people where they needed most to be helped. Those were his words. And Miss Rose said she taught kindergarten because she felt it a great work to start the buds right. Those were her words; you know how she looks when she talks about her kindergarten? And then Mr. Fleming said he wished he could help her; help the buds after they got out into the world. It was perfectly beautiful to hear them talk and me trying to read that stupid book. And Nan, I was just thinking wouldn't it be great, simply great, if they two saw light in the middle of the afternoon?"

Nancy's mouth hung wide. Jane had taken her by surprise.

"What would become of that kindergarten?" she gasped.

"And—and us and all who simply worship Miss Rose? Jane, you're like all practical people, when you let go you are—monstrous! Do you smell—biscuits?"

They both ran to the oven and looked in. "Perfect" was the verdict and then they

lighted the side lamps over the table for the twilight was falling and shutting in the dear little home under the Brave Pine so full of hopes and youth and gayety and love.

CHAPTER XII

THE SOCIAL EVENT OF THE SEASON

It was the night of the play and the Corners had indulged in early suppers and then made ready for the great occasion. The girls and Miss Rose had dressed early and at six o'clock, all but Joy and Jane, had gone to the village Hall. Joy was dressing Miss Mercy Flanders' hair while Jane put the finishing touches to the sprigged muslin. There were two kerosene lamps and four candles illuminating the living room and Widow Thorne in a new gown sat as audience and critic.

"Lands! Mercy," she commented as Joy gave a deft twist to the long strand of hair she held, "I never knowed you was blest with such a suit of hair. Combing it back as you have and knotting it so tight has been real deceiving and you ain't got more than a dozen gray hairs and you over sixty—if you are a day."

"You look about thirty—!" Joy broke in,

"and your hair is beautiful. The shampoo this morning makes it fluffy and shining—you must follow the directions I have given you. Brown soap and plain water are awful for the hair. There! look, Janey, isn't she—immense?"

Jane Trevor came to Mercy with the gown.

"Now—for triumph!" she cried. "Bend low, Mercy, I do not want to touch a hair. There!"

The violet and white garment fell in soft lines about the angular form and the bunch of lace and asters gave character to the shapeless body.

Mercy flushed as she saw her reflection and the expression in her pale face.

"I don't know about the beads!" Mercy looked lingeringly at the string in Joy's hands.

"Your neck's considerable stringy," Mrs. Thorne suggested, not unkindly.

"These beads *must* be worn," Jane insisted. "Her throat is a bit thin, but thinness is fashionable."

Mrs. Thorne bridled for her own form was ample and broad.

"Now people with shorter necks, plump people like you, Mrs. Thorne, only need a ruffle of lace; Mercy has to be built up."

The plumpness saved the hour!

"I've always allowed," the widow said, "that Mercy was better looking than what she gave out"—this was very generous—"most women set up a false alarm about their looks, but Mercy has always hid her light under a bushel basket."

"And at evening," Jane hummed to herself as she put a pin here and a touch there, "at evening there was light."

Then when the grooming was over, the four walked down the meadow path to the Corners. It was very sweet and calm and a new moon hung low in the August sky.

"They do say," Widow Thorne imparted as they stepped across the stone wall dividing the meadow from the road, "that Smith and Dallas have just outdid themselves filling up their seats to-night. After family and friends give out they took the old ladies from the Alms House. The inmates were powerful excited I heard."

"And," Mercy was striding ahead like a

grenadier, "Mr. Temple told me that there be a sight of folks at the Inn. They came in automobiles. The whole town is a-stir."

Joy thought of the unknown sender of the fifteen dollars and nudged Jane.

"I do hope horrid people are not taking this in for—for fun!" she whispered.

Widow Thorne and Mercy gave their tickets in at the front door of the hall and passed to the front seats. They were early and only a few village boys and girls were ahead of them. Jane and Joy, as actors, went to the stage door.

"At eight sharp," so *The Corners' Sentinel* said the next day, "the curtain went up before a packed house."

And so it did. Every seat was taken and Uncle Silas as shopkeeper in the famous play of *Then and Now,* beamed under his false eyebrows and grinned through his false beard.

The stage was well set as the inside of the village store. So realistic was it that Pa Temple from a rear seat exploded into clappings and a boy in the corner called out:

"I say, ain't that going some?" This rude outburst was quelled by popular disapproval.

Uncle Silas took his place on a sugar barrel and whittled the traditional New England stick with a huge jack knife. One after another the villagers came in to buy things.

"I declare if that ain't the spit of Mis' Allen," Mercy whispered to Mrs. Thorne, "and it's Miss Margaret if I don't miss my guess. She's got Mis' Allen's gingham frock on."

"And," murmured Mrs. Thorne, "there you be, Mercy Flanders, as true as life even to your sunbonnet."

Mercy looked aghast as Joy Deering impersonating her, asked the store keeper for a pound of lard and entered into conversation about the youth of the village.

That was the plan of the play. The first act was a representation of Compton Corners rather down at the heel with the village boys and girls hanging aimlessly about. There was some really bright lines for Goo and Nancy had outdone themselves in conversation. Jago as Mr. Fleming brought down the house and Nancy as the severe parent of a boy who wouldn't obey, was charming. Compton Corners saw itself in that first act as stranger eyes saw it and it didn't know whether to be amused or indignant.

"It's real play acting," said Deacon Jones to Pa Temple, "and if the parson stands for such doings we'll be a blot on the circuit."

"It don't seem quite good enough to be harmful," Pa replied broadly; "it's just a harmless take-off and I have long held something ought to be done to get the boys and girls off the roads and away from the store at night. It looks considerable comical the way these young people have done it, but it has truth in it."

Between the first and second acts the actors gathered in the cool shed back of the hall and talked together.

"Who were in those rows way in the rear?" Sylvia asked; "the paint got in my eyes and I couldn't see."

"It was too dim to distinguish them," Nancy replied changing Mercy's sunbonnet for a modern hat. "There were two old gentlemen, I saw their white hair and there was a woman and I think a boy!"

"Folks from over Belmore way," Uncle Silas put in. "Hotel folks, what wanted to take in anything that was going on."

The second act was Compton Corners Re-

deemed! There was the Club room that Mr. Fleming wanted. Books, games and merry young people filled the stage. They had a jolly time and when the older people entered all modernized and up-to-date, yet each keeping his or her own peculiarities, the audience's enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"I say," yelled an untrammeled youth, "see us fixed up and doing things. Ain't that grand?"

The play was a great success. The curtain fell upon flushed and triumphant actors and the people were liberal and noisy with applause.

Woe and Sporty as village youths had been side splitting in their lines. Jago and Miss Rose as Mr. Fleming and "The Lady from Town," had taken the on-lookers by storm. The clapping was kept up and in a body the company went before the curtain. Their eyes were more used to the lights by that time and the audience had moved forward and then from out the confusion a clear childish voice cried excitedly:

"I say, Nancy, we are all here!"

Nancy turned quite pale as she gazed upon a

small boy scrambling over seats in his effort to reach the stage.

"Me and Dad and Mother! Judge Conly's here, too, and Mr. Grandfather of Sylvia Dean. Joy's Mother is here, too. Oh! it's, it's bully!"

"Support me!" hoarsely whispered Nancy to Sylvia; "hold me up!" But Sylvia was in need of support herself.

"Grandfather!" she cried joyously reaching out her arms to the tall, silver-haired old gentle man coming forward; "oh! my Grandfather, dear!"

And surely there they all were and Bobbie Mowbray very much there, for he had scampered upon the stage and was hugging his sister rapturously.

No one in Compton Corners ever forgot the dance which followed the play. The Virginia Reel was so long that the musician at the screechy piano was tired out. All the newcomers danced and even Mercy Flanders succumbed at last, and, dropping into line, found herself face to face with Uncle Silas!

Nancy had adroitly arranged this and she glowed with satisfaction as she saw Uncle

Silas' absorbed and surprised gaze fixed upon Mercy's changed appearance.

Sylvia's grandfather led with the widow Thorne and even Bobbie Mowbray outdid himself as he capered about with Sally and Nancy and their friends. It was after ten o'clock when the party broke up and the receipts counted, for many tickets had been bought at the door.

"Fifty dollars and seventy-five cents!" announced Mr. Fleming with shining face; "but better than this even—you have helped to give them a new ideal. They will not forget the pictures of the play." He said this to Miss Rose and her face was shining, too.

"Do you know," she replied, looking clearly into the eyes of the young minister, "when I was a bit tired back there in town and had a yearning for the dear old hills of my girlhood, I saw these girls needing just what I had once had—freedom, simplicity and rest. They did not realize it, but they did and then we came! We did not dream that our coming would open new ways of service—we only thought of ourselves then and I do believe it is the precious Camp Fire sentiment that has

brought these wonders about. The yearning for passing the light on, undimmed; the co-operation and the fun of all-together-ness! It's quite wonderful."

"Yes; quite wonderful," Mr. Fleming repeated and his tired face brightened again. "I cannot think what it will seem like here at the Corners when you all go back—you and the boys!"

"It's only August now!" Miss Rose comforted.

Of course the visitors who had so mysteriously dropped down upon Compton Corners went back to the Belmore hotel that night in their two automobiles, but they arranged to spend the next day at Camp Brave Pine and give an account of themselves.

"Perhaps you'd like to go home with us?" Sylvia's Grandfather whispered.

"If you want—me, too!" But the old gentleman saw disappointment in the healthy, young face and strange to say his heart grew light within him.

"Want you?" he said; "not a bit of it. I'm having a free, happy time since I broke away from your apron strings, miss. I intend to

make the most of it until you insist upon coming back; but I warn you! when you and I take up our residence together again, I mean to enjoy your society more, for you begin to look—" he pinched her firm, round cheek—"interesting!"

"And Joy, dear, are you ready to go back with Mother?"

Mrs. Deering had a hungry look in her eyes.

"I think you better leave me a bit longer, Motherlie," Joy whispered; "you better clinch it!"

"I'd be jolly glad to stay on!" cried Bobbie enviously, "it's ripping."

"Small boys not admitted!" Nancy shook her finger at him.

The next day at ten, Margaret and Nancy from the pine tree lookout, announced that two automobiles had "tied up" at the pasture bars and several people and one scampering boy were on the way up.

"It's the scampering boy we've got to be ready for," said Nancy letting herself nimbly down from limb to limb of the tree. "Scoot to your wigwam oh! worthy Swift Foot and don your war paint and feathers."

They had all worked from early sun-up and the dining room was a bower of beauty and the table set daintily. Many cooks had not spoiled a single thing and the pantry and cool-cellar groaned with goodies. Each girl had evolved her "specialty" in pride of achievement.

"And at night the Ceremonial and Mary and Sally," said Margaret as she ran with Nancy toward the house. "These be stirring times oh! great Nameless One."

"They be!" panted Nancy, "but I wish that nimble brother of mine were not so rapid; we must all be on the porch to welcome them."

And so they were. For, with other accomplishments of the summer, the girls had learned to don their dress of ceremony at short notice and this would always enable them to perform their toilets more quickly.

Just when Bobbie Mowbray, hot and victorious, reached the crest of the hill he saw, somewhat to his amazement a band of Indians making for him. For a moment he was taken aback and he plunged his hands in his pockets and began to whistle.

"Scared!" imparted Nancy; "I know the sig-

nals. When he stops whistling the day is safe."

It was rather embarrassing for a boy of ten, single-handed and alone, to face the motley crowd, but Bobbie did it after a fashion. He knew all about such doings; he was no ignoble Boy Scout himself, but Bobbie was divided in his mind about girls availing themselves of the privileges that, for generations, had belonged to his sex.

"They are copy cats!" one of his masculine friends had once said to him, but Bobbie had been loyal enough to disagree with this.

"My sister isn't a copy cat," he had replied; "whatever she does will be something new. And why shouldn't girls have a chance to do what they want? The whole world of fun doesn't belong to us?"

That had staggered the masculine mind and it had proved Bobbie a Man of the Future!

But now he stood flushed and awkward before this sturdy company in feathers and beads.

"Gee!" he exclaimed.

"Whiz!" added Nancy; "we know the countersign. Advance Pale Face and receive your welcome."

Bobbie made a dive for his sister and was enclosed in her strong, loving arms. He thought no shame to be seen there. Bobbie was a brother of which to be proud!

And then the others came and under the sentinel pine they sat at ease after the greetings and inspection were over. All the chairs from the house were brought out and comfort made every one jolly.

"Now!" said Miss Rose at last, as she poured cool lemonade in glasses for the girls to pass around; "do let us hear all about it."

"Well," said Mrs. Deering, "I suppose I started it. I was hungry for a sight of Joy and as Mr. Deering and I were motoring about we ran across—not over—the Judge and Mr. Dean. We all owned up to being in the same boat—not automobile—and we got the Mowbrays to join us and spin up here. We had to drop Mr. Deering on account of business but we tried to get Mrs. Lee. She felt she could not leave the children but oh! what a change there is in her and them. They are having a glorious time and are fat and brown and strong!"

Margaret's eyes filled with happy tears.

She had missed her ownest own from the joyful party, but she was such a dear that no one had guessed it until that moment.

"I'm glad they are like—that!" she said happily.

"And—hasn't any one a word of my little Mother?" asked Jane, her big eyes bright and clear.

Judge Conly patted her head; quite overlooking the fact that she was his stenographer and business helper. Jane looked very young and childish as she sat there in her Indian togs.

"I can," said the Judge. "That little mother of yours has developed remarkable traits. She's found data for me I have been trying to get for years. No one ever doubts her and she gets them to open their hearts. The traveling and the country seem to agree with her. She says she has gained ten pounds since she started out even with all the interruptions and irregular meals."

"Mother was always a bit of a tramp!" Jane said in a little quivery voice; "she has often said that had she been less respectable she would have taken to the business of traveling salesman."

Every one who knew Jane's tender little mother laughed at this.

"But I did not come on pleasure alone," Judge Conly continued, sipping his lemonade; "I always have an eye open for business even in my holidays. I'm rather a severe, hard person."

Jane looked timidly up and smiled at the benign old face. "These parts," the Judge went on, "were my family's camping ground originally. Not five miles from here is my grandfather's old farm. A family of Swedes have it now—a homesick, lonely lot, and they want to sell out! I've made them an offer and I dare say it will be accepted and then I'll have another white elephant on my hands! I'm always having my offers accepted."

The kind face looked comically helpless.

"What am I to do with a farm up here in New Hampshire? It's in good condition now; fine cow, horse and chickens. Good garden and all that—but where can I get any one to live on it; take care of it and open it up for me when I take a fancy for the old home?"

While Judge Conly was speaking, Jane's little face underwent many changes. It

flushed, grew pale, quivered and then strengthened for a purpose.

"Judge Conly," she faltered; "I—I have an eye for business—couldn't Mother and I live up here? We'd care for everything and with one man—we could do wonders. I'm a country girl at heart. We could send you butter and eggs and always the house would be open when you cared to come."

The appeal was so sudden, so earnest and unexpected that every one looked surprised, but no one doubted the Cricket's seriousness. She spoke breathlessly as if afraid the glorious opportunity might escape her. Judge Conly turned his keen eyes on the flushed, girlish face.

"And lose my office helper and the best of traveling inspectors at one dash?" he asked.

"But gain two caretakers and home makers!" Jane retorted.

"It isn't always summer in New Hampshire!"

"Oh! Judge Conly, in winter it must be more heavenly. Think of the whiteness and purity; the starry nights and the open fires! You see when my father was ill with that lung

trouble we lived, all of us, for two winters in a cottage among the Adirondack hills—I shall never forget the beauty and peace—I've been homesick for it ever since."

The little audience under the pine was very quiet. The jollity was hushed. Pretty Jane seemed to be pleading for more than a girlish enthusiasm. A deeper, sterner note rang in the appeal; every one had forgotten about Jane's father and it almost seemed, now that they remembered, that Jane was asking for her chance to escape a danger.

"Well! Well!" Judge Conly again laid his hand upon the ruddy, curly head; "we'll see; we'll see! It would be very nice, to be sure, to come—home! I'd have to pay high for such a luxury; but we'll consider it. Books and magazines would help tide people through the shut-in months and I've always contended that to love the country you have to have the city in your heart."

"Well, anyhow!" Bobbie Mowbray burst in, "this is bully and I'd like to see the chickens again."

With this break the company fell into the former vein of fun and play.

The midday meal was spread out-of-doors under the pine and the arbor seats served as sideboards. There was much running back and forth and a good deal of merry joking. Sylvia's Grandfather watched his little girl with growing amaze and delight. All her young-ladyish affectations were gone; she was a healthy girl and gave and took with the best. When she told him she had made and baked the delicious biscuits that every one was praising he was as pleased as he had been when years ago, she played her first "piece" for him on the piano.

"It's the all-around girl I want!" he said with pride.

"Grandfather, dear," Sylvia whispered nestling close to him, "it could never have happened had I not come here. It's the girls and the singing of work and the seeing yourself as other girls tell you you are. Nancy was—was hard to bear at first but I just love her now and Jane is an adorable angel. One *wants* to be like Jane, but, Grandfather," Sylvia spoke more slowly, "there is a girl coming to-night—a girl named Sally. She was my favorite hating thing once, but now—I am

beginning to—to see I can help her and it makes such a difference."

"Dear little Syl," Grandfather replied, pressing the fluffy head to his shoulder, "you've learned the a, b, c, of life and we must work up the alphabet together."

"Dear Granddaddy!"

"Dear little Syl!"

The afternoon seemed to the visitors to be set to music. The beautiful work song rippled through and above the clearing of the table and the washing of dishes. Bobbie was enchanted.

"We fellows don't sing when we do things!" he vouchsafed.

"Try it, or whistle," Nancy suggested. "But give us Camp Fire girls the credit. It took a woman, my laddie, to set her labor to music."

"Well, anyway, a man wrote it for you," Bobbie retorted; "Jane told me so."

"True, my just and honorable brother and it only goes to prove that both-together-ness is what counts. The sooner you learn that, the better! So shake off dull care, Hide that look of despair and get busy, get busy, get busy!"

Bobbie laid hold of a pile of dishes and bore

them eagerly to the kitchen roaring at the top of his lungs:

"And *you* owe a rub! rub! rub!"

What a sunset that was! Margaret had been telling them all of the wonderful effects from the arbor but she feared this day, of all days, was to fail them.

"It's not a bit promising," she said; "but perhaps the stars and dear young moon will make up for it."

And then, as if the West had no intention of being outdone, the little scurrying clouds were marshaled together by a brisk, fresh breeze. The sun smiled upon them and "There was glory over all the land; a flood of glory!" said Grandfather Dean in a whisper as if he were in church.

No one spoke again for a long while; the beauty was so touching and vivid. Red and gold and violet radiance was tossed about and rose and fell until finally a purplish radiance held for a moment. Old Lafayette lay bathed in the splendor and only the nooks and crannies caught the night shadows. Even Bobbie was awed into silence. When the sun sank at last far—far behind the range Bobbie spoke reverently:

"That can't be the same sun we have in the city, Mother. It's a—a newer sun."

No one laughed. It *was* a newer sun!

"It's different every day," Margaret said and there were tears in her eyes.

"It's magnificent," breathed Judge Conly. "It settles me about the old farm. From the back porch, Miss Fay, I have the same view. I will build a broad piazza there which can be enclosed by glass and heated in the winter. I'll put in hot water apparatus and—and—" he was looking at Jane's rapt face which was fixed upon the darkening mountain.

"And—learn to live!" he added.

"And there come Sally and Mary!" Nancy announced; "how droll and picturesque they look coming over the meadow Indian file and their feathers flying in the breeze."

"I say," Bobbie ejaculated, "aren't the fellows coming? I call that mean to shut them out of the fun."

"As always, so thoughtful about girls," Nancy said with make-believe sternness.

"Well, that's different!" pouted Bobbie.

"All the same," Sylvia whispered to Joy, "I wish they could have come."

Nancy and Margaret, in the dining room, also touched upon this matter.

"Of course they were crazy to come," said Margaret. "Why, Nan, how many glasses are you setting out?" for an early supper was being prepared after which a ceremonial was to take place.

"Sally and Margaret brought a lot—better be ready for an emergency they thought."

"What emergency?" Margaret looked suspicious.

"Oh! smasheries, crackeries and such."

"Nan, do you think those boys *are* coming?"

"In times of peace, prepare for war! How many sandwiches have we, Meg?"

"Somewhere near a thousand I should say," Meg laughed as she brought forth plate after plate heaped with triangle dainties.

But no Knight of the Round Table presented himself and the supper went off as the luncheon had, except that Sally and Mary added to the entertainment.

"A song from the Owl!" Nancy called out as the luscious blackberries were being enjoyed.

Mary turned red under her tan but she did not refuse. Her summer had conquered much

of her shyness and she was always ready to do her part.

"Asarai, asarai
Nunierbut, nunierbut, nunierbut,
Asarai, asarai,
Erkrosiumagalierbungor."

Mary's voice trilled along over the Indian words very comically. Bobbie was deeply impressed.

"Whillikins!" he exclaimed, "that last word is a jaw breaker all right, all right! Say it again Miss—Miss—Owl, I want to try and get it. It will be a sockdolliger in my camp."

And again Mary repeated the lines while her eyes shone:

"Erkrosiumagalierbungor."

It took Bobbie many a half hour to conquer that even after Mary wrote it down for him.

"And now a poem or story from our Scribbler," Margaret urged; "the rest of us have been showing off all day. Our two new members must do us proud."

Sally's eyes fell.

"It's only a little thing," she explained—"it isn't worth anything."

Bobbie rose to the occasion:

"I bet it's ripping," he said clapping vigorously. Then Sally plunged on with her latest bit of poetry:

"Oh, we are happy Camp Fire Girls,
In our frolic and our fun,
In our work of joy and service
In our deeds of kindness done.

'No matter what our work may be
In the days that pass along,
We strive to make it a pleasure
And do it with laughter and song.

"We are taught to think not of self,
But of those whose way may be drear;
To do little deeds of kindness
Whenever the chance may appear.

"We wish to be pure, truthful girls
To follow the Master above;
May we ever live up to our motto,
Wohelo—for work, health and love." *

Every one was touched by Sally's literary attempt and her earnest manner.

"And now," said Miss Rose when at last everything was in order again, "I'm going to

* Camp Fire Girl.

spring my surprise. Uncle Silas suggested it. As this is a big celebration for us he proposes a bonfire!"

"A bonfire!" Bobbie hopped about with delight. "A really truly bonfire on a hill. Cracky! I don't know whether I'd rather be up here with it or down below looking at it."

"Stay where you are, Bob," Nancy advised. "No one can ever tell what may happen at the critical moment."

"The old outhouse—it was once a smoke house," Miss Rose went on, "is falling apart and is quite an eye sore. Uncle Silas suggested that we burn it down to-night. We'll have it for our fire!"

"How perfectly splendid!" cried Sylvia, clapping her hands; "Uncle Silas is an artist!"

"An artist?" said Sally with professional touchiness, "just telling some one to burn down a smoke house, isn't being artistic. Is it, Nancy?"

"We have much to learn, Sally," Nancy replied, "but oh! Miss Rose, no one but you must touch the spark to your ancestral ruins. My! isn't this the greatest ever?"

There was much scampering and many or-

ders and then the little group formed around the old smoke house.

Miss Rose stood close to some brushwood piled under the rotting boards and recited beautifully:

"Long years ago when our fathers fought with great animals you were their protection."

Just then a tiny tongue of flame sprang to life.

"From the cruel cold of winter, you saved them. When they needed food you changed the flesh of beasts into savory meat for them.

"During all the ages your mysterious flame has been a symbol to them for Spirit—"

and now long ribbons of red and yellow leaped high and wound in and out among the sagging boards. Off in the distance Uncle Silas cheered lustily.

"So to-night we light our fire in remembrance of the Great Spirit who gave you to us!"

Miss Rose stepped back and inch by inch the others gave way before the intense heat. The smoke house was a pillar of flame against the blackness of the night, then something hap-

pened which, oddly enough, no one had foreseen.

From near and far, calls and voices rose. They came ever closer and closer. Across the meadow and up the hill, hurrying forms were seen and the first to arrive were Mr. Fleming, Jago and the dog Danny!

The people on the hilltop were amazed and conscience stricken. In their own enjoyment they had not counted upon the fright they had given others. The whole village turned out to fight the flames of what they thought was the dear gray house under the pine. Miss Rose was appalled and stood the picture of woe, the bright red glow lighting her sorry eyes.

Sporty came upon her and turned the thing into a jest:

"Come, come, Miss Rose!" he said loudly; "who but you would ever have thought of giving us such an invitation? It's immense. Now that we are here, let's get all the fun out of it we can. Speech! Speech!"

As this vague invitation was uttered people laughed and turned to one another.

"Pa," whispered Sally to Mr. Temple, "you

make your election speech what I wrote for you!"

"I—I ain't learned it all," Pa Temple whispered back.

"I'll stand close and prompt you. I know it from A to Z."

"Speech! Speech!" again called Sporty.

"Mr. Temple!" Mr. Fleming shouted; "he's running for office. He surely has a speech."

And then it was that gentle Pa Temple made his bow before the public and gave voice to the opinions of his own which his daughter had set down for him.

It was Mr. Dean who noticed that Sally stood close to her father and murmured now and then a word or two. Somehow it touched his imagination. It was a pretty sight.

"That's the—girl—I hated once," Sylvia breathed, close to her Grandfather's ear.

"You mean before you knew her?"

"Yes, Grandfather. And oh! Granddaddy, dear, I want you to send her a pretty party dress as a surprise. Take it out of my allowance; don't let her ever know. I'll give you the measurements."

Mr. Dean looked perplexed.

"A party dress? What has that to with—" he looked again at the brown little maid at the side of the speaker and he caught the words: "not fellow citizens, Pa, the next time say, 'friends and neighbors'!"

"A party dress, Sylvia?"

"Yes, Granddaddy, dear. She isn't always helping her father—sometimes she's just like me—actually aching for—fluffy, pretty things."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BELATED LIGHT

It was as they were all going down the hill that night that Uncle Silas found himself beside Mercy Flanders. Mercy had never sunk to the dead level she had known before Jane Trevor had brought her up to the standard of the sprigged muslin. She had been, according to herself, "considerable upset when she saw the fire" and her face was still flushed and excited. She wore her ugly gray and black wrapper but her fine hair was becomingly dressed and a bunch of red geranium flowers was pinned in her belt.

"I just couldn't bear to think of fire wiping out them on the hill," Mercy said panting a little.

"What's the use of wearing yourself out, Mercy, trying to get ahead of me?" Silas asked with a twinkle in his eye. "I can go you one better any day of the week."

"I don't know any plain reason for you to

think I had you on my mind, Silas. Fast walking is one of my accomplishments. Lands! I guess I have to step lively or I'd never make both ends meet." Mercy tossed her head. That was an accomplishment, too. Silas recalled how Mercy had always tossed her head when she was most moved. She had tossed it even when she walked behind Sam's body that day as they bore it from the cave.

"Mercy, don't you think at our time of life if we joined forces we might both, as you might say, walk slower; take more breath and enjoy the end of the day?"

And who now can doubt that Uncle Silas was an artist?

"I ain't one as forgets," Mercy again tossed her head even more violently.

"And I ain't one as does either," Silas assured her. "But half a century of waiting and mourning is long enough 'less you want to make it everlasting. We're both old, Mercy, and we've lost a lot but there ain't any sense in being stubborn. Sam won't think any the worse of you by and by because you let me lift the heft of things off you just at the end of the road and I 'low there won't be anything 'twixt

Sam and me if you show him preference in Kingdom Come."

"It was just that sprigged muslin!" Mercy was crying softly. "I oughtn't to have got it out. There was more folded away in the folds than lavender."

"Come! come! Mercy. Them little injun gals on the hill has stirred us up in many ways. The live, loving little critters! What with their spirits and flames and loving kindness and quarrels and makings-up and wanting to share the world with folks, they have set us all to music like what they set their work to. Mercy, what do you say to setting *our* work to a tune?"

"It will have to be short meter!" Mercy gave a nervous laugh at her own witticism.

"Waal, we kin sing it as slow and long drawn out as we want to. I had a good middle bass once."

"And I ain't lost all my alto," Mercy put in. "But lands! It would be real shaller for us to—to think of getting married. I guess the Corners would bust with laughter."

"I guess they wouldn't!" Silas straightened himself. "I'm going to put it up to Miss Fay.

She's a master hand like her Aunt Patsy before her. Mercy, once I went to old Patsy Fay and told her about me and you after—Sam's going, and she said 'bide your time, Silas. Mercy's had a blow to her pride as well as to her love, wait till her pride's mended.' "

"And—you've waited, Silas?"

"All these years, Mercy. It's hurt me to see you toiling over your tubs and in your garden, but I sensed you were mending your pride."

"I was. I stuck it out."

"All right, Mercy. You just lay down your hoe and washboard. You leave this to Miss Fay and me."

And three days later Uncle Silas went to Miss Rose as she sat sewing in the arbor.

"The injuns off?" he asked.

"Yes. A game of fox and hares. The boys and Mr. Fleming are with them. Since the parents went a reaction set in they had to run themselves back to old times."

"Waal, it's real quiet-like without them but what you said about them is true of me, Miss Fay, I've been, waal, not exactly running, but meandering back to old times myself."

Miss Rose kept her eyes on her work. "Yes?" she said softly.

"And I've found—Mercy Flanders, Miss Fay."

"She remembered you, Uncle Silas? Remembered how good and patient and kind you were and are? I hope she remembered all that."

"I ain't asked her jest what particulars she noted, Miss Fay, but I—cornered her. Caught her rather out of breath as you might say, and overpowered her with—" Silas grinned, "logic and common sense. There ain't much choice for Mercy at her time of life. It's the almshouse a few years later on, or me now! She's willing but her and me is up against it as to how to make the coming together reasonable instead of comical. I don't want Mercy's feelings hurt by being made a butt of." Uncle Silas suddenly became dignified and Miss Rose loved him for it.

"It couldn't be what you might say a wedding in the ordinary sense and yet there must be a wedding. The church is out of the question and likewise Mercy's home. Neither ain't fitting."

"Uncle Silas, will you leave this to me?" Miss Rose's face was all aglow. "It is such a happy ending to your story and Mercy's—no; not the ending; just the beginning—I want to think it over. Can you trust me?"

"Yes, ma'am! You and your Aunt Patsy Fay be considerable mixed up in my love affairs. I ain't never told you 'bout your Aunt Patsy and me—I mentioned it to Mercy last night. I ain't what you might call superstitious, but I am leaning to the on-natural in love and birth and death. Yes. I'll let you think this over. But I tell you, ma'am, nothing ain't ever lighted on this place like you and your young 'uns! They just pass the light along like they sing about. They've sot the Corners to singing and humming. I heard to-day down to Temple's store that those skinflints, Dallas and Smith, are bidding up agin each other for the Boys' Club House what Mr. Fleming is sot upon. That fifty-odd taken in the other night mounted to one hundred and fifty in less than twenty-four hours and now Smith and Dallas are shaming theirselves into being public spirited."

"Glorious!" cried Miss Rose.

"And there's going to be a village collection and I heard say that the town folks was going to ask Sylvia and Joy and that Sporty young gent from down the creek to do the begging."

"I'm sure they'll do what they can. Oh! how lovely it all is—this service to others!"

And that evening Miss Rose told Uncle Silas' story to her girls. They sat very quiet until she had finished then it was found that they were crying softly and lovingly for Miss Rose had made a tender romance of the pathetic little confidence.

At last Nancy spoke up as she wiped her eyes vigorously.

"Half way methods will never do," she exclaimed. "We might make a shabby little excuse for a wedding but I'm for having the real thing. Of course some folks might laugh and jeer—well! we won't invite any folks and so escape that danger! We all would look upon such a wedding as a—as—kind of holy prayer of praise or a—a—psalm of thanksgiving so why shouldn't the blessed old dears have an out and out wedding?"

"Oh, Nancy—you—darling!" Jane Trevor rushed to Nancy and kissed her vigorously, "I

was so afraid you'd suggest something less."

"We'll write to the home folks and have little boxes for wedding cake sent down," said Margaret, "and I'll *make* the cake!"

"We'll send for some pretty white stuff for dress and veil," Sylvia broke in.

"And we'll all make the gown."

"I'll give silk stockings," said Joy.

"And I the slippers," said Jane.

"Well, Uncle Silas seems rather left out," Miss Rose laughingly put in.

"Bless his heart!" Nancy's eyes were still wet with tears; "I have my eye on his outfit. Leave Uncle Silas to me."

So the letters to the families were sent and each bore the tender story of Silas and Mercy. And at the end of a fortnight things began to come and happen. Neither Uncle Silas nor Mercy was let into the secret and they were both waiting until "Miss Rose thought her way out."

"Considerable heft to that box," cried Uncle Silas, who brought the packages from the station. " 'Handle with care' painted on it, too. Waal, I did my part. No tender infant could have been handled gentler."

The box contained Judge Conly's gift—some dishes of pretty china and all the plain table silver the modest home would need. Neither Mercy nor Silas had ever dreamed of such wealth and the girls danced with joy as they imagined the delight with which this gift would be welcomed. Mrs. Deering had sent Mercy many useful and pretty articles of dress but the material for the wedding gown and the delicate veil came from Jane's mother.

The Knights had been let into the conspiracy and what laughs they had had been kept for themselves. The boys had thrown themselves body and soul into the wedding preparations.

"Just pass Uncle Silas over to us!" Sporty announced from the assurance of his social and moneyed position; "the bride isn't going to be the whole show here, you bet!"

"I leave him to your tender mercy," Nancy had said; "I would have done my best, but I resign in favor of your betterer."

Such whisperings and excitement! Such a number of unlooked-for gifts, for the shabby little story had been told in the city and friends of friends begged to be allowed to send a

trifle. Sensible offerings they were, too, for wise advice was given.

"Oh! Miss Rose," pleaded Sylvia one day, "may we have a bride's maid and a maid of honor?"

This needed thought for Miss Rose recognized the necessity of keeping within bounds.

"I think Jane should stand beside Mercy. Jane discovered her and then Grandfather has sent that party dress to Sally and if she were maid of honor instead of matron of honor it would be so perfectly splendid."

So this new departure was spoken of and planned. Sally was beside herself with delight. Her lovely blue dress that had come as a "tribute to her talents" was the holiest thing that had ever come into her life. She got up at night to look at it in the closet to make sure she was not dreaming.

And on the first day of September the wedding came off! It was an afternoon affair and because the day was bright and warm the ceremony was held in the arbor which had been decorated with asparagus fern and golden rod until it was a thing of beauty. Under the pine a table was spread ready for the "supper" and

near by another table stood filled with gifts that neither Mercy nor Silas had yet seen.

"I always reckoned the sprigged muslin would be my burial shroud," Mercy had weepingly explained when first the new wedding gown was broached. "But it might answer for this shaller wedding of two old dolts."

There were *two* dolts now instead of one!

"I don't like to be beholding to any one," Mercy went on, "and when Mis' Thorne and the rest hear about this—Lands!"

But the great throbbing secret was sacred to the two camps, the city friends and Mr. Fleming. The girls had all had a hand at the wedding gown. Long, filmy and cloudlike it hung around Mercy's angular form concealing the sharp lines and emphasizing the tall slimness. There were orange blossoms, too; Mrs. Lee had thought of them. When all was finished and Mercy beheld herself in the mirror she bent her head and sobbed aloud.

"It can't be me!" she cried on Miss Rose's shoulder, "oh! it's just the wishes and hopes and longings of me—the long ago me—come true!"

The Knights in a body brought Uncle Silas

up to the house. They were all in evening dress, even the groom.

"It's criminal I know," Sporty announced, "to be wearing these at this untimely hour, but there are no in be-tween togs and Uncle Silas confided to Jago that since he was ten years old he had pined for a claw-hammer coat and trousers that look as if they would bust! Isn't he a peach?"

Nancy agreed that Uncle Silas was a peach.

"They'll be a pair," she added.

"Come off!" cried Goo. "A peach is bad enough but a pear! Nancy, you're going the limit!"

Nancy made a face at him.

At four o'clock the procession came out of the little gray house and walked slowly to the arbor while Woe played the Wedding March on his fiddle. Even Danny was there with a huge white bow on his collar.

Mr. Fleming stood in the arbor and the setting sun was at his back. Before Mercy and Silas, walked little Jane, in a dainty summer dress and Sally radiant in her first party gown.

Silas had taken on dignity with his claw-

hammer coat; his trousers were snug and wrinkleless and he was groomed to within an inch of his life!

Mercy had got beyond mere commonplaces. Facing the west she saw only the glory of the passing day and in her vague, untutored way, she knew it was emblematic of her life. All that was rich and comforting were hers now when she was old—but yet younger than she had felt for many and many a year. She looked, through her dim faded eyes at little Jane leading valiantly on; she looked at plain Sally whom she had known all her life, but now so changed and magnificent. Then the tears blinded her,—poor, happy old Mercy!

No one had the slightest inclination to laugh at the odd bridal party, every one, even Goo, looked preternaturally serious.

The marriage service was simple and beautiful. Miss Rose never forgot it. It was Mr. Fleming's own and it was quite different from the old form with which she had become accustomed.

They were not, the bride and groom to "forsake all others," that struck Miss Rose first; "but be mindful of all others through their mutual service."

At last it was over and the company could come down from the heights. This they did with energy. Then the surprises began.

"Them presents—for me!"

The new Mrs. Thomas exclaimed, tossing her head and setting the wedding wreath awry.

"Lands! Silas, we can't be beholden to this extent, to any one! Silver? Now, plated ware I might have considered, but real, genuine sterling! Why, it will put us under obligations to the end of our days."

"Waal," Silas returned, standing stiff, but dignified, beside the table which bore more wealth than he had ever expected to possess, and then toward Mercy who represented more happiness than he had ever dreamed of in long, lonely years: "I don't know but what I want to be obligated, Mercy. I want to feel, not for those *things,* but for the fellow feeling those things stand for, real obligated all my days. Every time I put a knife or fork to my mouth I want to remember these—" Silas waved his long, lean arm to the company; "and I want my soul to be eternally grateful for all they have brought to me and you!"

"Hear! hear!" cried Jago, and a big cheer rose.

After that wonderful speech what was Mercy to say? She wept a little more, wiping her eyes with a filmy handkerchief that Sylvia had insisted upon her accepting as a last touch to her costume.

"Goshem!" Mercy ejaculated, bunching the trifle into a ball with her gloved hands, on which the long empty finger-tips showed like claws; "this sort of handkerchief ain't conducive to lamenting and I don't know as I have anything to lament over!" Her tone was doubtful and perhaps, in that minute, she was thinking of the long-ago love. Nancy always believed she was and it gave to Mercy an added touch of romance.

The supper was one to be remembered and when Mercy cut the cake the company rose respectfully. The little boxes filled with slices of the cake appealed to Mercy more than anything else.

"I guess when them tidbits speak for themselves," she said, "the Corners will set up and take notice."

The touch of feminine pride set Sporty off in a gale of witticism.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, "Jane, Danny and

I will take a basket full of boxes and deliver them at the doors. The personal attention will mean more than mail service—besides we can gather information. What do you say, Jane?"

Jane nodded gayly, Danny barked appreciatively and Mercy beamed with pardonable enjoyment.

And so it was that before the wedding party on the hill broke up, the three couriers started forth with Uncle Silas' horse and buggy. Never was Jane to forget the experience, nor the display of human nature which those little white ribboned boxes evoked. So well had the secret been kept that not even Mrs. Temple knew that Silas and Mercy were other than the two lonely old people whom the Corners pitied and tolerated. Mrs. Temple had believed Sally was at a party on the hill quite different from what really had taken place. The Corners certainly sat up and took notice! The friends and foes of the couple made themselves very manifest but, Jane was happy to note, there were more, many more friends than foes.

"The ongrateful critter!" The widow Thorne exclaimed when by smelling and biting into the contents of her box she assured herself this was no cruel jest.

"The ungrateful critter! I've invited her to my three ventures and here she is launching forth on her first—and at her age, too!—and not an invite for me as has done much for her."

It took Jane fully fifteen minutes to soothe the ruffled widow and make her see Mercy's point of view.

"Well," Mrs. Thorne, at last said, "judging from *my* experiences, she'll need all the friends she ever had or is likely to have and I ain't one to bear a grudge."

But the funniest part of the delivery service was at the farms of Mr. Dallas and Mr. Smith. The families were utterly taken off their guard. The women folks were all in a flutter; the men surprised to the verge of shock.

"Why," said Mr. Smith, "I allas looked upon Mercy as headed for the county farm; but I ain't going to let any city people outshine me where our folks is concerned. I'll see Dallas to-morrow and start something in the way of a wedding present from the Corners."

And that was the beginning of the end which evolved into a bit of pasture land which Silas had long envied and which, added to his tiny farm, made him feel like a landed proprietor.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INSPIRATION

NANCY lay curled up under the pine, a pad of paper before her and a fountain pen in her hand. She was in the throes of composition and her ruffled hair and contracted brows bespoke stern purpose.

"These frivolous affairs of our elders," she mused, "have distracted me horribly. Did we come to Camp Brave Pine to settle the difficulties of our superiors? No; we came for rest and recreation."

Then she edged into a new position and tackled the pad again. She was trying to write a letter to her father! Never before had she known this duty other than a pleasure but now it loomed difficult and high.

"Dear Dad:" she began, then tore off the top of the sheet. "Beloved Father:" But that did not look businesslike either.

"I can't make a joke of it," she murmured, and the pine tree in a soft whisper agreed.

"Honorable Sir!" Then Nancy laughed and looked at her watch. The Rural Free Delivery man would be at the pasture gate in one hour. All the other letters lay white and innocent in a pile on the seat of the arbor and her letter, the letter that must propose a great humanitarian act was yet to be written. It was Nancy, not Sylvia, who, with Joy, was to solve dear Margaret's problem.

"Dear Sir:" That would make Mr. Mowbray laugh and of all things he must not laugh.

The hilltop was very quiet—the girls and Miss Rose were down at Mercy Thomas' new home. Nancy herself was going as soon as she had finished the letter that was not yet begun:

"And I hope to be a writer some day!" The words came savagely. And then desperately Nancy plunged in without any form or style.

"It's about that money of Aunt Nancy's," she wrote; "the money that's coming to me when I'm twenty-one or, if I die before that, it is to go for the education of some worthy person. Now, Dad, you know I did not want higher education. I wanted—*home* and just

enough to do to keep my self-respect. The secretary work will be the right thing for me but I've found the 'person' to educate and who should it be but dear Margaret Lee! I would never have found it out had we not come up here—living in the city prevents you knowing people. Coming up here and having the Camp Fire spirit burned into you, has done it. Father, you, I and Aunt Nancy's money have, in some way, got to educate Meg. It was bad enough to inherit the name of Nancy —the money ought to give me a little pleasure. Now, Daddy, help me out—" Nancy was getting down to ordinary terms and her words flowed more freely. "Meg is as proud as Cuff —whoever he was—but the world ought not lose such a woman as Meg, educated, would be. I think she would make a college President or a Great Organizer if she had the finishing touches put upon her. Her family must be made to see that they ought to sacrifice something for her while she's in the making and Meg herself must be forced to put her pride in her handbag (there are no pockets to-day). I can suggest, but you must *do!* It will be snappy work, Mr. Mowbray, and sharp prac-

tice, but you're equal to it. Advance the money, sir, and when I am twenty-one I'll pay you back (keep this letter for reference). If I should die before I wake (excuse the levity), you'd have the money to expend anyway. It's Meg who is going to be hard to handle—she'll have to be made to see that in accepting education, she is unselfish. She has a passion for self sacrifice. Mr. Mowbray my honored Pa, do untangle this mess for your devoted.

"CAMP FIRER."

Nancy read the production over again and held it out at arm's length.

"For pure business combined with friendly interest and daughterly faith," she said with her bright smile, "I call that a masterpiece. When I'm rich I'm going to make education gettable for them as wants it. Think of Sylvia kicking like a little broncho against going to college and Joy, without wit enough to pass examinations for a kindergarten class, and me with just decency enough to want to put some of my day to practical use, and great throbbing souls, like Meg's and Jago's, just allowed to mend stockings, cook and stuff learning into

heads not worthy the stuffing. The world's all wrong!" Nancy was declaiming to the great open spaces—"It's up to us Camp Firers and others like us, to untangle the snarl. If I can head Meg for some college I shall not have lived this summer in vain."

Nancy folded the important document, directed and stamped it and then made her way down the hill. She left all the letters in the box for collection and ran light heartedly on toward Mrs. Silas Thomas' little home.

Mercy had moved all her belongings over to Silas' house, which was larger and better than hers. There was an air of comfort and warmth and brightness everywhere in the rooms and Mercy herself was quite another person.

"I says, say I, to stick to your bargain," Mercy was saying to Miss Rose as Nancy entered.

"I took your washin' and ironin' and I mean to wash and iron you till you depart. Silas is willing and I says to him this morning when I saw the first snow on Mt. Washington, 'Silas, says I, when the cold sets in we'll be glad to have the extra money.' And what's more, Miss Fay, Silas and me have sot our minds on

keeping up the Saturday Club and having a fire in the parlor for it each week."

"Oh, splendid," said Miss Rose, "and the people have decided to turn the loft, over Mr. Temple's store, into the Boys' Club. We'll send books up from the city for both clubs and we'll think and think of you." Miss Rose's eyes were shining.

"Well," Mercy replied folding gently the last snow white garment and putting it in the basket, "the thoughts will pass back to you from us up here. The mails may be shut in, but thoughts kin fly."

Already Uncle Silas' manner of speech was descending upon Mercy.

The girls were silent. The little, new home with its hopes and brave promises was a sacred thing to them and each one knew how often her memory would hark back to this happy summer and the dear, hill people.

The basket of fresh laundry was borne in turn by the girls and Miss Rose over the pasture and up the hill. They talked gayly and lovingly together and planned surprises and returns next summer as they went on. When they reached the letter box at the stile they

paused to get the mail. Every one had two or three letters and there were papers and magazines galore.

"A letter from the Judge!" cried Jane Trevor sitting down upon a rock to open it. The others waited. "When I see *his* handwriting I know something is doing. Now by the pricking in my thumb I feel that 'business calls me hum!' "—Jane went no further for she was lost in the closely written letter. Presently she began to cry, at first softly and gently and then, with her head on Miss Rose's shoulder, more violently.

"Why, Janey," Nancy exclaimed, rushing toward her, "bad news?"

"Can't you tell the difference?" Meg whispered, "whatever it is, it isn't bad news—it's good!"

And then little Jane pulled herself together.

"I'm such a goose!" she faltered; "such a plain goose. Oh! Miss Rose! girls! It is the farm! Can you not see it all—the back porch and the sunsets! the open fires and the books. The beloved out of doors and the quiet stars—the—the fear all gone that I may—have my father's disease of the lungs? Oh! oh!"

Just for a moment confusion followed Jane's excited words, then Miss Rose seemed to realize that something had shattered forever, for one brave little soul, all difficulties and fears. It was a glorious moment and no new fears or difficulties of the future could ever take from this hour the glory for little Jane.

"Let us take it in sections," pleaded Nancy, settling herself close to Jane. "My poor brain has, this summer, been taxed to its limit. We came for peace and rest and we've had—" she looked comically about—"well! we haven't had exactly a flat existence. Jane, *what* farm?"

"Judge Conly has bought his old family place; improvements and repairs to begin at once;" Jane clutched the precious letter in her trembling hands and controlled her emotions.

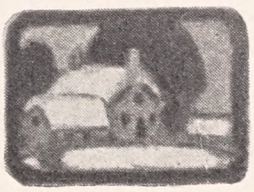
"And the foreigner?" Margaret interrupted; "What is to become of the present owner—the foreigner?"

Jane referred to the closely written sheets. "He will remain and work the place on shares. He will live in a small house near by and his wife will agree to do any extra house work which may be required."





A LETTER FROM THE JUDGE! CRIED JANE



"Snappy work!" Nancy exclaimed, "go on, Janey."

"Mother and I are to keep house, feel the place our home and arrange our lives to suit ourselves with these conditions—" again Jane turned to the letter and read:

" 'I would like to have a bedroom and small library reserved for me as I shall want to feel free to come unannounced at any time. Butter, poultry, &c., may eventually be possible for city use, though I do not demand this.' Then," Jane's eyes filled again with happy tears, "the kind man is afraid he's been too coldly businesslike. Listen to this. 'But I *do* demand that a certain young person, namely, my late stenographer, continue to look in as bounding health as she now does or she will reflect upon my business ability. I also demand that said stenographer's mother, who has recently vowed she likes nothing better than to travel through heat and dust to gather grim facts for a curious old man, shall settle down and—forget it!' Forget it! Isn't that exquisite when Judge Conly says it?"

"He is one of earth's noblemen. Every one knows that who knows him."

Miss Rose said this almost reverently. "Oh! what a beautiful place this world would be if all rich men believed as Judge Conly does, that his wealth is his only in trust and he the steward!"

Margaret Lee's eyes were fixed on the far hills and Nancy, looking toward her understood the patient, unselfish longing in the quiet, big-hearted girl.

"Mercy me!" thought Nancy; "I hope my dear, old Dad will come to the fore and prove himself worthy the words Miss Rose has just used of another."

"But oh! Janey." It was Sylvia who spoke and genuine affection and pride rang in her tones; "how can I get on without you? I've been planning *such* things and I want—oh! I want so much to have you for—for my bosomest friend!"

Every one laughed but Jane, she looked up sweetly and said:

"Sylvy, dear, there is always going to be a dear, wee bedroom next mine for—a friend! You must all come in turns and bring the old life to Mother and me. Judge Conly even mentions that!"

"Winter in the hills," breathed Joy Deering; "it will be—divine!"

"And—how we will yearn for it!" Margaret's eyes were still fixed on the far peaks. "I often go to Central Park where it is rocky and lonely and still in the winter—and dream of such a place as this must be when the snow lies white and soft over everything."

"You'd have to keep the fires up, Janey!" Nancy broke in, making every one laugh. "I insist upon that."

And then there was much chattering and discussion of details. Long, long dreams and plans were indulged in on the way home and finally Jane Trevor and Miss Rose, carrying the basket of laundry between them, fell into quiet, intimate talk.

"Miss Rose, dear, can you imagine how the old fear has haunted Mother and me—the fear that I might inherit my father's lung trouble?"

"Yes, little Jane."

"I had to work, and so had Mother, but often when she was the merriest I have seen the fear for me in her eyes and when I have taken cold and felt worn out—I've lain awake nights thinking of poor little Mother without—me!"

"There! there! Janey dear."

"And oh, Miss Rose, we love the country so. Mother and I will live to be ninety-eight; and the rooms for the blessed Judge will be like shining welcomes calling him to his own. He is often so tired and lonely. I've always felt it—and Mother and I can make a bright spot of real home life for him and then you all! You will come just naturally and bring your lives into ours. Isn't it wonderful to make little pieces of heaven on earth? And oh! dear, if there were only more patches of heaven, by and by they would touch and lap over and then there would be—"

The sentence was never finished, but each in her own way was thinking:

"And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth for the former things had passed away."

Dinner was evolved from much excitement and hilarity. Mistakes were made and laughter resounded all over the little gray house.

"Sylvia Dean!" Nancy called from the cellar, "that's the third time you've taken the butter upstairs. Take lard next time for variety."

Sylvia good naturedly called back:

"I really have, three plates of butter on the table!"

"Well," Nancy comforted, "who wouldn't try to ease the situation by a little grease? I call it pretty doubtful business this. Bringing the cream of New York City up here for an innocent little vacation and having it skimmed in this fashion. I am sure I do not know what a certain frivolous set will do without Jane Trevor."

"Oh!" Sylvia replied, sitting down disconsolately upon the lowest step of the cellar stairs with a plate of butter in each hand, "I can just see the worth-whiles heading for Compton Corners every vacation—summer and winter. The midwinter dances will be bleak affairs with all the nice boys up in New Hampshire snowshoeing, skating, sleighing and doing all the other fascinating stunts." Nancy shook with laughter.

"And this from our Sylvy!" she bubbled. "Cheer up, chummy, there is no sex limitation in traveling. What's to prevent—"

And then both girls gave a smile of joy.

"Sure enough—what's to prevent? It's like having your pleasures scattered all over."

But that evening quite late Nancy Mowbray and Joy Deering went out under the shining stars and stood with arms about each other near the brave pine. Nancy had decided to take Joy into her confidence.

"What college, Joy, are your cruel parents trying to force you into?" Nancy asked.

"Bryn Mawr," Joy whispered discontentedly. "I've just been thinking, Nan, of college —after this! It's like looking forward to prison. There isn't enough of me to educate to make it worth while. I don't want to be educated; I don't want to go to—to prison— I want to *live* and be free!"

"But there are girls," Nancy's voice was unusually tender; "who, I suppose, would see the way to freedom *through* a college. There are such queer girls."

"Yes. Meg Lee is like that. Do you know, Nan, she said the funniest thing the other day. It was the day we all had that cross-country run and she and Jim Nichols and I were together for a time. She said that she felt that there was something in her that had to be educated into—into usefulness. And Jim Nichols said 'yes' just as if he knew what she

meant. Then he went on and said 'it's something the world ought to have at its best, too, only folks are too stupid to understand.' And then Meg said, 'Well, even it is a blind crippled thing if we do our best with it—our real best —it will count.' Now what do you suppose they meant?"

Nancy's merry face was strangely still and tender.

"I think I know. Meg and Jim Nichols are different from us, Joy. They are hungering and thirsting for—what we are incapable of wanting and which is being flung at our heads."

"I don't know what you mean." And indeed Joy was in the dark. Since the talk with Sylvia on this same subject, she had almost entirely forgotten it.

"Well, I mean something like this. You do not want to go to college but you *do* want to do the social stunt and have a good time and settle down, after a bit, in the nice-society-girl-fashion. And I want to help Father and be free to—don't laugh, Joy—but be free to let genius burn! I want to gather material where and how I can and have no one tamper with my—

my—style! and by and by I want to write a big human thrilling novel unhampered by convention and—and—and—other things!"

The fine girlish face quivered under the cool touch of the night and little Joy Deering felt the call but could not comprehend it.

"I—I didn't know you cared so much for style!" she murmured looking with puzzled eyes into Nancy's.

"Style!" Contempt was softened by pity. "Style! Why, Joy, you little duffer. I mean—well, what does it matter? But this *does* matter. Neither you nor I want to waste years and money in being educated into something we do not wish to be."

"No." On this head Joy was clear and firm. "But some people think college finishes a girl—it does in more senses than one!" Unconsciously Joy uttered a great and stupendous truth.

"Well, it's all Tommy rot!" Nancy exclaimed. "There are other folks—big, still, unbegging folks like Jago and Meg who ache for what would be wasted on us. They want to go to college—Jago will go because, being a boy, he is free to work himself through if his health doesn't break down."

"It doesn't look as if it possibly could!" Joy put in vaguely. "He's the strongest thing I ever saw."

"Well, anyway, he ought to put that strength to the main thing instead of puttering it along in the summer in order to get through the winter. And Meg, being a girl, doesn't even get *his* chance. Why, Joy Deering—" and here Nancy backed against the pine and flung her eternal truths in blind-girl fashion out into the night and into Joy's simple little heart, "Meg Lee is lavishing her divine spark on mending stockings and wiping her little brothers' and sisters' noses and filling in gaps—and her loving mother is taking it all without a single thought that it is an awful wrong. Why, Meg ought to be made into something big and great and given to the world! Instead she'll go on filling in until her splendid soul and longings will be gathered into something small and criss-cross like the darn in one of those everlasting Lee stockings."

Joy Deering felt dizzy on the high place to which Nancy had dragged her. She was a bit breathless too, and felt strangely ignorant and commonplace.

"You talk—awfully talky!" she said finally. "I think Mrs. Lee is very nice and sweet and unselfish and the Lee children don't have colds in theirs heads *all* the time. Besides I heard Mrs. Lee say last winter that Gladys was helping with the stockings now."

Nancy looked wanly at Joy and knew in that moment the soul-loneliness of the peaks!

"Joy," she began, trying to frame her words to meet the situation. "You do not understand, but take my word for it, Mrs. Lee, with all her little fluffy chicks, has hatched a pretty good swan as well and she doesn't know what to do with it. Meg's the swan. She wants to get out in the wide—well, the wide ocean and—swim!"

Joy was becoming more and more dazed as she listened. Suddenly Nancy came down to earth, flat footed, as Mercy Thomas would say.

"Oh! Joy, you and I together, in some way, must give Meg a chance—to be educated. Get higher education!"

And then it was that practical, fluffy little Joy got her bearings.

"You mean," she gasped tasting her first nibble of power, "that you and I can put Meg through college and give her her chance?"

"Exactly! Oh, Joy, how responsive you are. Exactly! It's a big stunt and I've asked my precious old Dad to help me and you must ask your father and mother and we must—see it through! It's all the doings of this summer. It has brought us close and it's the Camp Fire spirit which makes girls just plain girls and—deeper friends. Can't you see how it has made Judge Conly think straight about Jane? Oh, it is the coming-together-ness! We all knew each other from outside and every one of us had a little circle. This camp has broken down—oh! Joy, I wish you could understand—but it has broken down the circumferences and—let us in!"

For a moment Joy was very silent and her pretty perplexed face looked pale and strained. The tall pine quivered in sympathy with Nancy's far vision and Joy's more contracted outlook. The sweet, peaceful breeze lifted the hair from two eager girlish brows and the quiet summer night held them tenderly and close. Then at last Joy spoke, feeling her way timidly out into a new thought.

"I—I do understand a little Nan, dear. It's like waking up and finding yourself in a

strange place with other people's things about instead of your own. I've always thought of myself; what I wanted and what I wanted to do or not do. Now I see dear old Meg's wants and longings that she never talks about and Sylvia's too. She and I used to think alike, but she—is different now and I know she often thinks me silly. Nan, I want to keep up with you all. If I can do anything, I want to. It would be perfectly splendid to help fine Meg to a—to the ocean! I never heard of a swan on an ocean, but perhaps you have. Anyway —I know this much: I can lead father and mother just as easy as easy, especially if it is for something—big!"

Thus it was that the plot was conceived and worked out under the pine on the hill. It was no light or easy task and both Joy and Nancy often sighed as new complications presented themselves.

The days passed and no letter from Nancy's father arrived and the conspirators grew heavy hearted.

CHAPTER XV

THE TOWN CLUB'S DANCE

THE loft over Pa Temple's store had become a thing of beauty and a joy to the hearts of the boys and girls of Compton Corners. For, be it known to the everlasting glory of the boys of the place, once the Club House was an assured thing, they came forth with ideas and ideals of their own. The Knights of the Round Table and the charter members of the *Town Club,* met upon a certain evening to discuss the future policy of the association. The hall was decorated with flags and freshly cleaned. The odor of brown soap and paint greeted the proud nostrils of those present while the kerosene oil lamps, against the side walls, flared and smelled energetically.

Jago, a born leader of men, sat upon the kitchen table which was to do service as desk. The three or four dozen bright yellow wooden chairs stood about the room and offered hospitality to all.

"Come to order!" called Jago bringing a sawed-off croquet mallet, known as the gavel, down upon the table. "I call this meeting to order and we will now proceed to elect officers."

Mr. Fleming, from his far corner of the room, looked upon the scene and gave a grateful sigh. Poor and shabby as the place was, it was a center into which to gather those boys and give them new interests. But the newly elected president was speaking! He was a tall, awkward boy—the gangliest boy of the town; a boy in the rough! His face was quite scarlet as he faced the assembly but the dignity and sanctity of office was upon him.

"Fellers," he said trying to assume an easy attitude, "I've got something to say, but I don't know as I can say it like what I mean. We oughter be real grateful for this club and what it's going to mean and we've got to do it credit and don't you forget it! Any mean tricks will be set upon and swearing and lying ain't going to be tolerated."

The perspiration stood on the President's furrowed brow. This first oratorical flight of his was bearing him beyond his depths; he saw his one-time mates gaping at him with hanging

jaws but he also saw the Knights looking at him with trust and expectation.

"Yes, siree! this Club ain't going to shame this town not if we know it. It's going to mean something good and decent and them what ain't willing to lend a hand kin have their ten cents a month back and git out! Whatever us fellers do outside this club is one thing; what we do inside it, is another. And now I'm going to say something what some of you may kick against, but I've thought it out since I came in here to-night and by Jiminy I'm going to say it!"

Inspiration now flamed from the scarlet, streaming face.

"This here club was helped along by women and girls same as by fellers and Mr. Fleming." (Hear! hear! broke from the listeners.) "And all this week girls—I ain't going to mention no names, I don't have to—have scrubbed and washed windows and brought these here flowers to make things nifty and it seems dog-gorned mean and small of us, now we've got this club, to overlook what's been done and given. I'm going to propose that this here Club, known as the Town Club, have one night a week for

ladies' night,"—the trail of Jago was detected first and last through this speech, but only Mr. Fleming realized it; even the speaker had been brought to believe that these noble sentiments were his own;—"on that night we can have fun together. Dancing, games and a play now and then. More'n that if the girls want to use this here hall for their own things and if it doesn't interfere with our business, I'm for letting 'em have it for—" and here came the final sky-rocket—"if this is a town club, I say let it *be* a town club. And girls are part of this here town and a big part."

As soon as the listeners could command themselves a thunder of applause greeted the waiting soul of the exhausted President. The Knights shouted themselves hoarse and the one or two masculine creatures who had boldly announced earlier in the evening that they meant to vote down any "sissy business," now were lost sight of in the general enthusiasm.

The proceedings following the president's address were recorded by the new secretary who spelled so badly and wrote with such difficulty that he, too, assumed an expression of deep suffering. The new treasurer came to

the fore and announced that he was prepared to take dues and, under Mr. Fleming's supervision gave neat receipts that seemed to fill the members with awe.

"Received from Tom Donnelly, ten cents for monthly dues to the Town Club."

The slip assumed dignified proportions and was reverently folded and placed in a safe pocket.

Then Sporty Nilson with Danny at his heels, stepped to the front of the room.

"I want to say," he began clearing his throat, "that we fellows want to help you fellows in the best way we can and so, for the others, I want to say—" poor Sporty was no orator!— "just a few words. I want to say—"

"Why in thunder don't you do it?" whispered Goo from a near-by chair.

"I want to say, that we fellows will give to you fellows all the games and things like that to set you up and each one of us fellows will send to you fellows a magazine every month or week as it happens to come out. Likewise we'd like to pay dues and be counted as members of this Town Club for when we *can,* we like to be in good company. And that's what I wanted to say."

Danny sitting on his haunches gazed admiringly at his master and gave a sharp yelp of appreciation that caused Woe Olney to giggle aloud.

"And I have something to propose." It was Jago who now spoke. "I've consulted with Mr. Fleming and he thinks it is a legitimate way to raise a little fund of money for the Club. A week from to-night I suggest we have our first Ladies' Night and on it we will give a mild kind of a show. Each one of us and certain girls whom we may invite will come in costume—any favorite character of history or romance; wear masks and act our parts. We will ask the older people of the town to come as audience and there will be a prize for the man or woman who guesses correctly who is who. We'll charge ten cents apiece for admission tickets and the money will go into the club treasury."

This speech was greeted with wilder enthusiasm than the President's had. The hall was in an uproar and, for an hour after, all seemed talking at once so full were they of suggestions and ideas.

There was no corner loafing in Compton that night.

Two days later Miss Rose took from the letter box at the pasture bars a formidable looking envelope. It was a large yellow envelope and upon it was inscribed various things that caused her to pause by the pasture bars and seek to decipher. In one corner was a tall pine tree standing guard over a trim little fire—that was easy to guess! On the opposite corner was a round table about which were gathered several small dogs and one lone man-figure. That made Miss Rose laugh aloud. Then came the words "Commanded by" and underneath the one word "Town" and the picture of a club.

"The Knights and my girls," thought Miss Rose at last, "are commanded by the Town Club to—what?" And then she opened the envelope being careful not to tear the design.

The invitation, having been worked out by Jago and put into form by the Club's secretary, was most explicit. They must all choose a favorite character and act the part!

Miss Rose was girl enough to see the fun of the plan and she knew, with Mr. Fleming and the nice Knights, the thing would be safe and enjoyable. So she hurried up the hill to spread the news.

Such a pretty, home scene greeted her. The hot, late August morning had made exercise intolerable but each girl was busy. Jane was sewing—her neat basket in her lap and her pretty tanned face bent over the shirt waist upon which she was working. Nancy was husking corn with a vigor and dexterity that made Miss Rose laugh to herself. Whatever Nancy did outside her own beloved sphere she did well and strenuously. She always seemed in a hurry to get through with it, but she never shirked or slighted. Sylvia was peeling potatoes daintily and unconcernedly. Sylvia had achieved! Joy was beating a pudding as if her life depended upon it. Her eyes were full of fire and the tip of her tongue showed between her even, white teeth. Margaret was reading aloud and no one noticed little Miss Rose as she paused at the side of the house to listen.

"Then she called her Camp Fire Girls to her as she stood beneath the Brave Pine and she gave them her dear blessing and told them that she read with comfort and quite clearly the marks upon their foreheads and was glad that they had kept the faith. 'Sweet Cricket,' Hiatini said, laying a gentle hand upon the

Singing One, 'you have won out and will now have a large cage in which to learn new songs and gladden many hearts. Swift Foot you have shaken off the shackles and can now run with speed upon the way; but I warn you to be guided by your head as well as your heart or you may reach the lesser goal and divert the plans of them Higher than Thou.'" Margaret paused. "What are all the capitals for, Nan?" she asked. "They look so funny."

"Ancient style." Nancy replied yanking the ear of corn she held savagely. "Besides capitals command attention. Swift Foot take heed!"

Margaret flushed and went on.

"I hated to have so many good capitals wasted on me unless it was absolutely necessary," she said. Then:

"And Dauntless you have gladdened my eyes day by day as we have journeyed through this Land of Promise. I have seen you do battle with all your old sins and temptations. I have seen you lose your beauty and sylph-like grace with no unmaidenly protest. I have seen you accept freckles with a dignity worthy of deeper defects and I have seen your character emerge

from the ashes of your past, bright and fearless."

Sylvia Dean at this let her hands drop in the pan of potatoes while her laugh rang out clear and strong.

"This New Pilgrim's Progress, Nan," she panted, "is the funniest thing I ever heard. I'm sure when Miss Rose reads it she will collapse. Do go on Meg!"

And then the Wap came close to Hiatini to receive her blessing. The Wap was changed in more senses than one. She was now a substantial Wap. A happy Wap and a Wap with the inner light of conscience shining in her once uselessly pretty face.

"Happy Bird," said Hiatini, tapping the Wap's guileless nose 'thou hast soared off of thy narrow perch and hast learned the magic truth that other birds exist and other perches are as important as thine own. I see, in the future, a Wap who will teach other birds to sing songs, perhaps, sweeter and stronger than her own; I see a Wap giving up her own perch in order that a Worthier Than She Shall Occupy It.' "

Margaret laid down the manuscript and wiped her eyes.

"Nan," she said at last between peals of laughter, " 'Worthier Than She Shall Occupy It' is all capitalized. It sounds—alarming and *looks* like fury."

"Poetic license," Nancy calmly rejoined laying the husked corn in a row. "Two apiece and four left over for succotash to-morrow," she counted. Then: "Continue, Meg, I do say it, who shouldn't be forced to, that that is my masterpiece. Bunyan isn't in it for terseness and understanding of human nature. Pitch in, Swift Foot, there are three more."

"The Scribbler and the Owl now presented themselves as candidates for blessing. The Scribbler bore a quill in her hand and the Owl looked wise beyond her years and tradition. 'I see' quoth Hiatini, touching the Scribbler with awed and reverential touch, 'that your pen will have it in its power to drag forth from air tight compartments, the family skeletons. I see your power but I also see your mercy which has fed upon the mercy shown to you on this pilgrimage. You will open closet doors only to give air and sunlight; you will bring forth skeletons merely to endow them again with life and cover their shivering bones with good

warm flesh. You will do good, not evil, all your pen and ink days and you will be honored in whatever station of life your father's political jobs land you!' "

"Well!" Nancy exclaimed gathering the husks in her big gingham apron; "I call that burst simply grand! It is better even than I knew."

The girls were rocking to and fro with laughter and Miss Rose had to draw back behind the shelter of the house for fear of betraying herself.

"Go on, Swift Foot, I'm a genuis all right, though a modest one. Thank heaven! it doesn't take long to cook Country Gentlemen. This breed of corn is indeed a perfect gentleman."

"Oh, Nan," Meg wiped her eyes. "I wonder if Sally and Mary will understand this—this—"

"Epic," Nancy suggested. "I think they will. Hurry up, Swift Foot. The best is yet to be!"

"Then the Owl raised her soulful eyes to Hiatini and gave heed to the words of wisdom which flowed from the beloved lips. 'Wee

Owl, you have done much to make me realize the Accomplishment for which I yearned. When an Owl acknowledges its limitations it is well on the way to being an eagle. Not content with what it once knew, it reaches up and up to crags of learning until it awakens suddenly to the fact that it has evolved! Owl, I leave you for awhile, in the Valley of Desire knowing full well that you will play the game fair until I return. You will keep the flame alive and steady. You will work and love and grow strong and prove the sacred reality of the Camp Fire Spirit. It is you who will light the Valley while I journey afar and by your faithful service my feet will find the trail leading back.' "

"That's positively pathetic," whispered Jane from her place near the pine tree, "the serious touch, I suppose?"

"Exactly," Nancy nodded. "Light and shade; pathos and humor. Tricks well known to the true artist. Hustle, Meg!"

"Last came one shrouded in mystery. With hanging head and stumbling feet she approached and stood before the great Hiatini. 'Who art thou?' breathed Hiatini. 'I know

not,' replied the Shrouded One. 'I await—my name and blessing. On this pilgrimage I have blundered on, catching a glimpse, now and then, ahead and making for it to the best of my ability. I the nameless, crave a title at thy hands.' And then Hiatini, stumped and flabbergasted, realized that she was up against it. 'Uncover!' she commanded. The draperies fell and a face scarred by many a lost conflict came forth. 'Look up!' Eyes full of hope and despair—despair in one eye; hope in the other—flashed imploringly. Hiatini looked compassionately upon the odds and ends that had been thrown together in the Nameless One and were waiting to be formed and molded. Then her heart throbbed in understanding pity. After a moment she spoke. 'No longer Nameless are you,' she said kindly, 'but I dub you, Help! I see your mission lying straight and clear before you. In helping others to get what they most desire you will form yourself into something firm and worth while. As in the Pilgrim's Progress of ancient days, Help brought others out of trouble and destruction and set their feet upon the way to the Gate leading to their heart's desire, so must you, with

all in your power, help every other pilgrim and by so doing help yourself.' "

Then Margaret laid down the manuscript and looked at the author.

"Oh, Nan," she said softly; "oh, you dear, funny, sweet, old Nan!"

Nancy got upon her feet and her face was serious and thoughtful.

"Look to it!" she exclaimed gathering up her ears of corn, "that no obstinate pilgrim rob me of my chance to come into my own."

"Never!" cried Jane springing up beside Nancy. "We'll all cry, Help! whenever we get stuck. Won't we, girls?"

"Yes, yes," they said—all but Margaret and she kept strangely quiet.

"And you, Meg?" Nancy fixed her brown eyes on Margaret's sweet, firm face.

"I was just thinking," Margaret replied; "it is so dear to help and help and help, I wonder if I could accept help as freely and yet—"

"One can be as mean that way as in any other." Nancy seemed talking alone to Margaret.

"I know—and it is harder to take than give. I was just wondering how it would seem to call Help when you get stuck in the slough."

Miss Rose did not join the girls just then. She went, by the back door, to her own room and there, alone with shining face, she knelt by her window opening to the west and prayed a little fervent prayer. It was a prayer a tender woman had prayed long ago for all yearning, trusting souls.

> "Wash pure my heart and cleanse for me
> My Soul's desire."

All her desire for rest and peace and goodness seemed at that instant to have come true.

"Oh! my beautiful, holy summer," she whispered, "my soul's desire."

And then she went downstairs to her girls. They were all busily engaged getting the noonday dinner and they were doing it skillfully and well. Not a girl among them but could, when necessity demanded, plan, prepare and serve a wholesome, dainty meal.

But it was during the evening that the invitation to the Town Club was discussed.

There had been a sharp, severe thunder storm at five o'clock and now the cool breeze from the northwest came briskly into the open windows and warned the occupants of the

bright room that hot weather could not be depended on any longer to last.

"I smell—pines!" said Sylvia sniffing luxuriously.

"Old Faithful wants us to know he's there just outside," Jane replied.

"The north wind and he are old chums," Nancy added and then Miss Rose told them about the invitation.

"Well, of all larks!" Joy exclaimed, "I dote on masquerades above anything. We had one once at school and I was—a doll!"

"You can't take that rôle now," Sylvia broke in, "you're too fat to carry around; though you *might* be a walking doll."

"I have an idea," Miss Rose interrupted, "quite a brilliant one." Her face was very gentle and kind as she spoke. "How about going as Pilgrims?"

Nancy and Margaret gave her a keen glance; but Miss Rose's face was as bland as could be.

"It would be so easy to make long, graceful gray or white robes with nice, little, pointed hoods. Each could carry a staff, and a mask like the hood would safely disguise us. The costumes would have this merit; being alike, no one would envy another."

"Superb!" cried Nancy, "and oh, girls, the idea is broad and rich with possibilities. We could *act* whatever part we choose. Our favorite character! Such fun! Such fun!"

The room was in a hub-bub. Reading was omitted that evening.

At nine-thirty Uncle Silas came into the room with his eyes dancing merrily. Every night the old man came up the hill from his new, little home, to see if the "children were safe and sound." He had wanted, after the wedding, to keep to his bargain and sleep in the place but Miss Rose had insisted upon a new arrangement.

"It reflects upon our courage and sense of independence," she had urged.

"Yes, ma'am, but a bargain is a bargain," Silas returned. "And time was when you all wasn't so brave and independent."

"That's true, Uncle Silas, but this summer has done wonders for us. Who could be afraid with the sentinel pine standing guard and the stars so near and—"

"There be dark nights and drab days," Silas interrupted, "and a bargain is a bargain."

But in the end Uncle Silas consented to

sleep in his own home after seeing every night that "things was trim and tight." Besides, and no one but Mercy ever knew this, many times the old man wakening suddenly had a "sense o' something wrong," and would steal out of his home and go quietly up the hill to have a look at the little gray house. Once Mercy had gone with him—it was a clear, fair, late August night with white moonlight bathing the lovely hills and meadows and shining full on the Presidential Range. They, two, old man and wife had, after the investigation of the property was over, stood under the pine tree hand in hand.

"What did you dream you sensed, Silas?" Mercy had asked.

"I don't know as it was anything particular," Silas replied softly. "You know how it is when you get what you want after a long run, you get kind of 'fraid your breath won't holt out to enjoy your blessings. It's more a sense of wanting to make perfectly sure than anything else. I like to be near them all; kinder habit! I like to think of these here light-hearted critters coming to The Corners and setting us, so to speak, on

fire; lighting us up, as you might say, with their whim whams and what not."

"Yes," Mercy nodded her head; "and showing us that work and—and life in general can be set to music. Silas, I wish we had sung more in the past."

"Well, there ain't no law agin singing now we've learned the tune."

And they had gone, humming and singing down the hill.

To-night when Uncle Silas came into the living room, Margaret ran up to him and led him to the old rocker.

"How sleek and *fat* you begin to look, Uncle Silas!" she cried.

Silas looked at his gaunt frame and grinned: "Nothing like contentment for making you look up!" he admitted. "Mercy is some cook though I ain't the one to say it. Mercy is a queer lot when she gets to pining and looking backward; she lights in and cooks a mess or washes up or scrubs and gets the past out of her system and then she's normal again."

"Uncle Silas," Nancy broke in, "that's what we've all been doing lately. Getting the past out of our systems. Just look at us now and think of the—past!"

She struck an attitude and Uncle Silas twinkled.

"This here air has done wonders for you, and no mistake," he said. "Speaking plain and flat footed I must say, that day I fetched you all up here in the hay cart, I misdoubted your sticking-out properties. I said to Mr. Temple down to the store that night, 'Temple,' says I, 'that load of airs and frills I landed up to the old Miss Patsy Fay's place some hours ago, ain't going to make it worth the price of their return tickets."

"But oh! we have, we have," Sylvia looked at Joy remembering their faint hearts a time back.

"By gracious! you have," Silas agreed.

And then they had a little singing because Uncle Silas loved it so. He chose the hymns and songs and his wide taste nearly convulsed Nancy.

"Lead Kindly Light!" he demanded, joining in with his big, bellowing, untrue, but yet sweet, voice, "that's my favorite of church tunes. That and 'Hark From the Tomb.' "

Then when the notes of Kindly Light had sunk into silence, Silas called for various negro melodies and patriotic songs.

"Stirring and uplifting!" he said, "and I say there ain't nothing like letting yourself loose in music for getting a broader point of view. Good night, children, and bless your hearts and souls. Good night, good night!"

CHAPTER XVI

HOW IT TURNED OUT

NANCY and Joy sat on the stile by the meadow. The Free Delivery Man had come and gone. He had left the mail and the country gossip.

"That there hall over the store," he had said, "looks some hall, I tell *you*. Everything ready for the dance to-night and no discriminatin' as to age and looks. Yes; me and the wife be going. The wife has a new gown. Bought with the hen money. Miss Fay's suggestion 'bout my giving Sarah a little income of her own is workin' fine an' when you come to think on it a woman as tends hens from eggs to Sunday dinner table, ought to get something out of them 'cept a jint or a piece of breast. Yes; Sarah is real grateful to Miss Fay an' so am I. It warn't so much closeness 'bout money as ailed me, as it war lack o' thinkin'. Jogging round the route as I do from year end to year end ain't conducive to

original idees. Minglin' and jostlin' with new folks is what has stirred us up."

There was a large packet of letters for the Camp people, but most of them were off on business or pleasure, so Nancy and Joy took to the stile and digested their own mail matter.

"I wish every one wrote letters on picture postals," said Joy, "they are so easy and you get from the picture a whole lot that you don't have to answer. This one's from Flo Travers. She's at Gay Head, 'Hideous place! Dressed up all the time and same old things going on.' That's all she says, but can't you see it? I sent her one of the Corners last week. The store and church you know. It's made her envious. Flo loves the unusual things."

"I hate picture postals," Nancy remarked. "It's a lazy way of getting out of writing letters. I wrote eight pages to Nell Foster three weeks ago just exhausting myself about this place and the fun we have and look at this!"

Joy took the card curiously.

"It—looks like the town jail," she said.

"So it is. I dare say the goosie just picked it up somewhere and never looked at it. See what's written."

"Having a great time!" Joy read.

"She ought to be put in the dear old jail for such idiocy." Nancy tore the card scornfully and put the pieces in her pocket.

Then the girls read quietly for a few minutes, other letters and postals, but one letter for each girl was left until the last.

"I have a letter from Father," Nancy said presently.

"So have I," Joy returned.

"Have we strength to—to face what they may contain?" Nancy asked.

"I suppose we must," quivered Joy. "Isn't it awful, Nan, when you want anything so much—to come smack up against it?"

"It—is," Nancy admitted, "and I must say, Joy, I think our honored parents have taken their time about considering our educational proposition. Talk about this being the age of the *Child,* I never read in history where the stern parent was more bossy than he is now. You open your letter first, Joy, my nature is deeper than yours—I suffer and enjoy more cruelly." Nancy grinned mischievously.

"I'm all of a—tremble." Joy's tanned hands *did* shake.

"Let's—plunge in together!" suggested Nancy.

So the seals were broken and two quiet, absorbed girls read and read and read.

Once or twice Nancy slyly wiped her eyes on a corner of her apron—for she had stolen away from home duties to get the mail—and once or twice Joy murmured apologetically, "how the dust does get in your throat."

Then after a long silence the letters were folded and two very serious young faces confronted each other.

"Our fathers and mothers have talked it over together, I see," said Nancy. "Well, four heads are better than no heads at all."

"My dear, dear father and mother are disappointed in me!" Joy's lips quivered; "they do not understand that I am just a plain girl; they—they think I am a—a genius or something!"

"They'll recover from the shock," Nancy spoke grimly, "the trouble with my parents is—they do not recognize the fact that I am one;" she gave her comical laugh. "They think I am foolish but they are not going to press the point. I will say for my Daddy

that once he is driven to the wall he knows it. Besides, he sees the advantage of having me about the house and helping him out. I fancy that in his innermost soul he knows I am right."

"My Father says," Joy went on, "that he will agree to what your Father proposes—you and I must do it, really, not make believe. We must sacrifice something, actually. It's business—and oh! I loathe business. Father says, he meant to give me an allowance next year of seventy-five dollars a month—I can do what I choose with it. Well, that's all right. I'm perfectly willing to give it *all* toward our plan, I know when I get in a hole Mother and Father will pull me out."

"Mine will not!" Nancy spoke very quietly and her laughing eyes were grave. "They won't and I'm proud of them for having so much character. Really, Daddy puts this whole thing on a high plane. It looks really worth while now. Just listen, Joy!" And Nancy opened her letter.

"It is a big thing, my daughter, this accepting or declining a higher education. I give you the credit of recognizing this and of

having thought deeply of your scheme. If you undertake to give to another what you yourself do not want, you must indeed *give* it. You must make this young Margaret Lee understand that her opportunity is offered by two friends who desire to help the world by preparing her for a service they cannot offer themselves. I will advance any money that is necessary and you can repay me as you wish—I will see that everything is arranged in a businesslike way. You must, you and Miss Joy, manage this independent Margaret. No one can, or should, come as close to her as young things like herself. As for her family—your mother has decided that she will call on Mrs. Lee, learn to know her better and, without intruding, seek to help you all on with, I must give you and Miss Joy credit by saying, a plan that has touched the hearts of us all."

Joy was crying quite unreservedly now, and Nancy could hardly read the words, her eyes were so dim.

"It's like a consecration!" she whispered, "and I tell you, Joy, my Dad is—is—a —gentleman!"

"So he is," Joy admitted generously, "and —so is your mother! And so are mine!"

The confused speech did not cause a ripple.

"I wonder if we *can* live up to such nobility?"

"I'm—thinking now of—Meg!" Nancy murmured.

"Dear, old, self-sacrificing Meg. Her wings have been clipped so short that when we go crying, 'wings for sale; wings for sale' I wonder if she will be able to trade her old wings for our larger, stronger ones."

"Now you are—talking talk!" Joy said.

"My stock in trade, Joy, dear."

Then the two sat and thought and thought, with their eyes fixed on the shining tip of Mt. Washington where the new, glistening snow lay like frosting.

"Suppose—we hadn't come, this summer!" Joy breathed.

"Suppose, Joy, suppose!"

Then they decided that they would wait until after the fun and frolic at the Club before they mentioned the letters.

"How on earth will you attack Meg?" Joy asked. Nancy considered a moment.

"It's going to be hard to find the weak spot

in her armor," Nancy admitted. "Like all other dear, quiet, softly acting creatures, Meg is cast iron underneath. I think we better make her feel that she will be a brute of ingratitude to her family if she doesn't accept. We better paint a pathetic picture of what she can do for them if she educates herself. Let's lay it on thick about sending her two brothers to college, and Gladys abroad to study music. Let's grow real tragic about her mother's old age made easy and glorious and her little, little sister's future made secure from want—she dotes on that baby! But for heaven's sake, Joy, don't let us dwell for a moment on Meg's own share in all this—if we win out it will be because we make the flinty little thing see she is sacrificing herself for everybody while she gets *her* soul's desire!"

Then sedately the two conspirators descended from the stile and made their way to the little gray house on the hill. At the top they came upon Mary and Sally, robed as pilgrims and practicing for the evening.

"Isn't it funny," Sally cried, running down to meet them, "once you get behind a mask and dressed up you can be any one!"

"She's been mimicking you all!" Mary laughingly explained. "Do Sylvia as she was when she first came, Sally?"

And, after a moment's hesitation, Sally complied. Mincingly and scornfully, she played her little part and Joy Deering looked on in amazement.

"Wouldn't Sylvy just feel outraged if she saw that?" she asked. "And anyway, she doesn't do it now."

"I wouldn't do it, if she was like that now," Sally explained. "I used to hate her. She made all the bad in me boil and bubble and run over. I took notes about her and was going to put her in a story—for a—villain; I call her the phenix. Kind of rising from her ashes, you know."

Nancy dropped down on a seat in the arbor and laughed until she could laugh no more.

"Do us all!" she pleaded; "oh! Sally do us all. I declare I think you'd make your fortune on the stage."

"I don't want her to do me!" Joy broke in.

"Do me then, Sally. I'm not afraid."

So Sally, spurred on by appreciation, "did" Nancy. Sylvia's lofty airs and capers dis-

appeared and Nancy's free independent manner, exaggerated and absurdly boyish, took their places.

"Heavens! am I such a—a bold creature as that?" Nancy asked rather appalled. "Do I stride and swing my arms in that fashion and shake my shoulders so when I walk?"

"No, Nan. It's hideously overdone," Joy indignantly replied. "I hate jokes."

"But I must have suggested it!" Nancy did not laugh now. "The inside of me isn't so upperty and untrammeled. I must take heed of my ways."

"I think you're great!" Sally broke in. "You walk and act like what you are."

But Nancy's eyes were grave. Presently she said,

"Do us, one by one, Sally. Let us guess."

Sally, highly pleased at her success, began the performance. She was unmasked now, but her long pilgrim robe hid her figure. Joy, Mary and Nancy, from their seats in the arbor, looked at the strange play.

"Why—it's—it's Jane Trevor herself!" cried Joy, fairly gaping at Sally. "If I didn't know it couldn't be I'd say Janey was

under that robe. How does she do it?—without talking and with only her face to help her?"

"It's perfectly wonderful!" said Nancy. "I'm going to tell Professor Alden about it when I go home. You know how bright he is about character sketches. Go on, Sally, you're a—a—scream!"

"She can do any one!" Mary exclaimed rapturously. "She's always done it. She can do Mr. Fleming with her father's suit of clothes on. She writes things, too, like what they say. It's terrible comical. She's wrote a sermon and it sounds like Mr. Fleming, only it's all a joke."

But Sally, warmed up now to fever heat of delight, was impersonating Miss Rose, Margaret, Mercy and even the Knights of the Round Table. Her impish little face was like a rubber mask. She twisted and distorted it, then let it assume soft curves and kindly expression. Presently it was Joy herself who blandly, ridiculously, and vacantly confronted the real Joy bending forward from the arbor seat.

"Oh! I'm sure I don't look such—a fool as

that!" Joy cried, laughing in spite of herself. "I—I am not so—empty-headed as that!"

"Don't you see," Mary explained with the pride of proprietorship, "she does 'em up more comical on purpose. You see we are just *hints* to Sally."

"Just hints!" groaned Nancy, "that's the humiliation. Just hints!"

Sally was in high feather. "Mother used to spank me for it," she admitted, but once I spanked my doll like mother, and after that—she never punished me. I tell you I spanked that doll real vividly and mother couldn't stand it."

"Sally!" Nancy had an inspiration. "At Christmas time I'm going to invite you and Mary down to New York for a visit!"

"Oh!" came in a chorus from both girls.

"I'm going to give you the time of your lives if Sally will act for Professor Alden."

"I will, sure thing!" Sally would have promised anything in that exalted moment.

"And every one of us will take turns giving you a good time," Joy added magnanimously.

"Oh! lands!" Sally sank upon the ground. "That's been *my* heart's desire all my life. Why, I ain't never even seen a train of cars except on the branch road. I think if once I got in a train on the main line—a train going somewhere but *here,* I'd almost die of glorification. And as for a steamboat—I've dreamed of steamboats until I've been seasick like Pa tells about. I want to see every bit of the world before I get through with it—but I'll be thankful to begin at Bosting and Noo York."

"And now Sally is herself!" Nancy laughed merrily; "just nice, whimsy Sally with her soul's desire in sight. Now, Sally linkum, give us that sermon by Mr. Fleming."

"Oh! Nan!" Joy broke in: "That's sacrilegious; it's like making fun of the Bible."

"Pooh! go on, Sally. If you're afraid of your religion, Joy, run along inside. It can't hurt mine."

Sally got up on her feet, ran behind a bench near the house and, stretching out her hands, looked gravely and penetratingly at her audience of three.

"Dearly b'loved, I'm here to tell you about

your sins and get money out of you. I want that you should paint the church and pay my salary up prompt and proper. I want you to help me bear up under the burden of losing my true and elegant friends up to Camp Brave Pine. I don't know how I am ever going to bear up under the affliction of doing without Hiatini and the rest—especially Hiatini. I want to do my duty by you all, the best way I can—and I look to you to help me—more specially you young folks with your future before you 'stead of behind you."

Nancy was doubled over in mirth; Joy was laughing helpless and Mary was elated at the success of her friend and just at that point Miss Rose came out of the house. How much she had heard and from where, no one would ever know, but her face was quite white and grave. She went up to Sally and put her hand upon her shoulder.

"Sally!" she said very earnestly. "Your gift can be a very happy or a very cruel one. If you use people against themselves to cause laughter, I would be sorry to think you were given a talent; but if you can show them more kindly and fine—it will help them and amuse

others as well. Never, Sally dear, never again use Mr. Fleming!"

"I didn't mean anything horrid!" Sally replied. "I like Mr. Fleming real well—he knows it too. I'd do anything for him."

"Then never make him ridiculous, Sally."

And that evening at seven o'clock the masquerade at the Town Club took place.

Mr. Fleming stood at the door of the hall and asked every one to raise his or her mask before going in.

"Just to make sure of friends," he said pleasantly. But no one but friends were there. Such an innocent, merry company it was of young and old!

"Might as well be a character while I am about it," Uncle Silas had said; so with Nancy's help he appeared as Christopher Columbus.

"Discovering things is quite in my line," Silas beamed upon Mercy; "continents ain't the only things lying around loose in the ocean of life."

"Now, Silas, don't be simple," Nancy cautioned.

She was impersonating her favorite char-

acter in romance—a certain Lady Maude of questionable literary value.

Jane Trevor had helped Mercy with her costume but the description had been so vague that Jane had been sorely puzzled.

"She wasn't much of a muchness," Mercy had explained, "but she was one of them real satisfying characters. No matter what happened to her—and considerable did happen—she was always on top of things. One article of clothing she wore always appealed to me. These was the words—'when she rode forth she had a falcon on her right arm.' I looked it up in the dictionary and the only falcon I could find was a bird. 'Course no one wears a bird on her arm—'tisn't sensible to suppose any one ever did even in them days, but I've fancied what it might be and I've concluded p'r'aps it was a kind of shield with a bird painted on it."

With this clew to follow, Jane had invented a costume that was a cross between a court dress and Mercy's Sunday gown, but there was a shield endorsed by Jago upon which Sporty had painted a fighting rooster with wildly disheveled feathers.

The knights themselves were resplendent in costumes ordered from Boston and carefully chosen by Goo Thornton's mother; who had entered into the fun.

Jago Nichols was resplendent as a Spanish Cavalier. His suit was too short and too tight for him and it was the hottest thing he had ever worn, but he carried his mantle and sword in a way that won admiration from the village boys and insults from the members of his own private party.

Tom Olney was a Viking and a very fierce one at that. He quite frightened Mary Allen when he asked her to dance with him.

Tod Nilson, was a most captivating Court Jester.

"It's a smart fellow who can *act* the fool," he had remarked to Jago when first he viewed the costume.

"How about the fellow who doesn't *have* to act?" Goo brazenly asked.

"He's a genius," Tod pleasantly rejoined, setting his bells to ringing.

Goo himself was a Monk and fell in with the Pilgrims quite as a matter of course.

"I reckon you'll need me on your hike!" he

said pleasantly to the first pilgrim, but when she answered in a mumbling voice, that he need not flatter himself, he felt quite at sea as to which particular pilgrim he was addressing.

"It's a mean dodge," he went on to say, in most un-monkly language, "to duplicate yourselves so; it puts the rest of us in a blue flunk. I bet you get into all sorts of scrapes. You'll have to come to me to confess."

At this a very frivolous laugh made the monk shrink away to reconnoiter.

The widow Thorne was, perhaps, the most startling figure in the room.

"Having been so unfortunate with husbands," she confided to Mercy, "I ain't had what you might say, an honest chance with colors. I ain't never more'n had mourning off than I had to put it on again. I've been out now for several years and I'm going to revel in colors at this party."

So as a "human rainbow," the widow Thorne went and took the breath of her village friends by her appearance.

"I didn't know as Mis' Thorne had sich a sense of humor," Mr. Smith exclaimed, as,

with startled eyes, he followed the fluttering streamers of rainbow-tinted odds and ends which comprised the widow's costume.

Sporty Nilson was delighted with the widow and so was Danny, who had been permitted to follow his master; he gazed upon her with flattering attention.

"See here, puppy," Sporty whispered, leaning down to fasten Danny's bow of college colors more securely, "you run after that fluttering rainbow and you'll be a dead dog for keeps."

Danny gave an innocent yelp.

The village band, composed of the volunteer firemen and the one policeman and the sheriff, played as if they were inspired. The dancing was thoroughly unconventional.

The company was not critical and those who did not care to dance round dances, very happily formed square ones and walked or pranced through them to the same music that timed itself more or less imperfectly to the whirling couples.

Sylvia and Jane Trevor were beautiful dancers, but generously and unselfishly they took for partners the lame, the halt, and the

feminine wall flowers. There was much fun and guessing as the evening wore on, as to who was who in pilgrim garb. What seemed a simple disguise at first, proved to be a most distracting one as the confused identities got more and more entangled. The girls themselves were much amused by one of their order who, in turn, acted them all.

"If I didn't know better," Jane Trevor whispered to Miss Rose, "I would think that was myself out there dancing with that dazzling cavalier. There's something fearfully familiar about that hitch of the right shoulder. Mother is always calling my attention to it—I do it when I'm ill at ease. Who has caught on?"

But Miss Rose did not reply.

"Who is that acting so conceited and foolish?" Sylvia asked, drawing, as she supposed, Margaret off in a corner.

"That snippy horrid one over there? I just believe it's Nancy showing off—she's lots of fun."

"Nancy knew a girl like that once," came the muffled reply. "She told me about her."

"She must have been horrid." Sylvia continued.

"So self-conscious and airish, as Nancy would say."

"She was. But Nan says the girl she knew wasn't half bad."

"I'm sure I'd hate her." Sylvia went on. "Look at her now, tossing her head and just making people notice her. I cannot bear to have any girl act that way even in fun."

But two mistakes of the evening were not fun. They were destined to bring about rich results.

The Spanish Cavalier and one of the pilgrims found themselves after a merry two-step by themselves near an open window, beneath which the Town Club had arranged a sort of un-cozy, Cozy Corner.

"Let me spread my mantle for you," said the Spanish gentleman. "It doesn't come off, but its length and breadth permit me to utilize it for a cushion in time of need."

The Margaret-pilgrim laughed her pretty friendly laugh and Jago, the Spaniard, thought he "had her."

"Miss Rose," he went on, "I just thought I knew you. I am glad to get you to myself. I have something to tell you. I've had an

offer to-day. It opens a path for me to what I long for—but I'm not quite sure I ought to take it. Will it bore you if I tell you?"

The pilgrim shook her head.

"It's from Tod Nilson's father. He wants me to go to college for the next two years with Tod—sort of pace him through, you know, and all my expenses paid. He put it to me as if I were earning my passage by chumming with Sporty. Of course I know that's all nonsense. Sporty could wade through and—I don't want to be a sponge."

"And yet you want the education?"

Jim Nichols was so excited that he did not notice the low whispered words or tone.

"More than anything on earth," he said boyishly. "I think I could make it—with three more years!"

"Make it?"

"Yes—my goal. Civil engineering. I want to get to Panama. Get to the new places and try my luck at hitting the bull's eye. If I don't take this chance I must—go into business next year. The course is too hard for me to—work my way through!"

Something seemed to hurt the heart of the listening pilgrim.

"Couldn't you take it as a loan?" she asked bravely. "You know you'll make good; you could surely pay it back."

"I tried that—but Mr. Nilson only laughed. He said if I could help Sporty win out—it would be worth double what was offered. I suppose he thought he could make me believe that!"

"Then," and now the little pilgrim's voice was shaky and eager, "you could give it back another way. Pass it on! When you become famous and rich and powerful—you could pass it on to other girls or boys; there are always so many longing for a chance—you could remember and *pay* them instead of Mr. Nilson, who does not need it."

"I wonder."

The Cavalier looked afar. The little pilgrim felt a hot tear roll down under her mask. She was looking very, very close at hand. She seemed to feel her mother and the children clutching, calling her to help them, help them always! Just for a moment Margaret Lee wished that she were a boy and her chance was given her! Then the wish passed and something her baby sister had said to her once

came oddly to her now. She had got up in the night to give the child a drink of water.

"Meggie," the soft voice had said, "just s'pose I should wake up some black night and there wasn't any Meggie to give me a drink!"

No, it must always be as it was. She, the big sister, must be ready to help them all through the days and nights!

"I—think I'll risk it! Thank you, Miss Rose."

And then the little pilgrim and the excited Spaniard rejoined the dancers.

Then it was Nancy who received *her* awakening a little later. Passing by Mr. Fleming who stood near the stairway, she nodded pleasantly and was surprised to find him a minute later beside her.

"You look as young and giddy as your girls to-night," said the minister and Nancy was too amazed to reply. "I have sometimes feared the burden of those flighty youngsters would wear upon you. It was positively noble for you to undertake such a vacation—but then I can imagine you doing just such unselfish, womanly things. Won't you sit down on the stairs for a moment, I want to tell you something?"

From sheer inability to do anything else, Nancy sat down.

"I want to tell you—"

"Don't you do it!" Nancy gasped. "Don't say another word! This isn't Miss Rose—it's—it's one of those giddy burdens who is wearing the life out of—Miss Rose!"

Mr. Fleming started back. "Which one?" he asked, surprise and dismay holding him.

"If I should tell you,"—Nancy was herself again now and disguising her voice beautifully—"you'd hate her forever after—but if you don't know you'll sort of scatter your—your hate and spread it on thin and forget it."

"I shall never hate you—Miss Nancy!"

And then, vanquished and humiliated, Nancy ran away.

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS UP TO NANCY

NANCY MOWBRAY, Helper-in-General-of-Camp-Brave-Pine, was, to use her own words, "gorged with terrible responsibilities."

She had come down the hill from the little gray house alone to have it out with herself. When Nancy made it known that she was about to sally forth there were always candidates as companions, so this afternoon Nancy had not announced her going forth. She sneaked away with a clear conscience, and once she gained the vantage point of distance and clear vision she shook her brown fist at the dear home-place on the opposite hill and muttered with her fine eyes rather misty:

"Oh! you!"

This sounded unintelligible but Nancy's mood was confused and excited. "Oh! you!" was about as clear as any remark she could have made.

The sunlighted meadow lay between Nancy's recently gained hilltop and that of the small gray house, brimming with dear human problems as Nancy very well knew.

"And it's up to me," she said to herself aloud for company's sake; "up to me to order them. I, who hate to manage folks and play the part of dumb, blind Fate. I'm not blind and I do not dare to be dumb and there it is!"

Then Nancy selected the flattest rock she could find, braced her back against a sturdy oak which had done some bracing against stiff gales itself in its lifetime, and—considered.

"Margaret's educational problems are easy," the perplexed Nancy confided to the inner Nancy. "I can bully her into the solution if the worse comes to the worst, and besides, in the end, she can say yes or no and make short shift of it—but this other!"

With this Nancy took off her broad linen hat, flung it several feet away with an expressive "there!" let down her lovely smooth brown braids and pressed her head against the friendly oak. Her kindly eyes took in the fair scene that had become so dear and familiar during the past happy weeks. There was an

edge of golden rod around the meadow and it leaned gracefully against the stone wall. The trees were changing rapidly from the rich green of summer to the glorious tints of autumn. There was a fringe of trees near the meadow that the girls watched daily. Every night a magic touch transfigured them.

"Beautiful, wonderful summer!" whispered Nancy.

She clasped her knees in her strong, young arms and fairly yearned over the tender sight below.

"Can it ever be the same again?"

A bird off in the distance gave a burring, joyful cry. It seemed to trill; "Better! Better! Better!"

"I don't believe it," Nancy flung back. Then her troubles gripped and held her. She was not thinking of Margaret, although she and Joy had come to a grand conclusion and were ready to attack the calm unsuspecting Swift Foot at the best possible moment. What Nancy was thinking of, with all her might and main, was Mr. Fleming's words and voice on the night of the dance at the Town Club. He had mistaken her for Miss Rose,

and, to a certain extent, she must handle the situation for Miss Rose. In all great moments of life Nancy had to have companionship, so now she flung out her perplexity and troubles to the wide, beautiful world that lay at her feet. Her words seemed set to music of the rustling, drying leaves, the calls of birds and the cool northwest wind.

"Just think of that adorable little kindergarten in New York that couldn't live without Miss Rose! Just think of taking the cream of everything and planting it here on these hills. Jane and her mother are bad enough, but Miss Rose is a public character and she is needed—there!"

"Tut! tut!" chirped a bird above Nancy's head.

"What do you mean by that?" The girl demanded indignantly. "This is no tut! tut! matter. If I keep quiet that—Mr. Fleming may never work himself up to the same pitch again and Miss Rose will never guess and she may slip back to New York and Mr. Fleming may get a call to go somewhere else and that will be the end of it!"

"Tut! tut!"

"Oh! keep still," Nancy ejaculated. "There are some birds I—abhor!"

"Hor!" shrieked a crow bent on business in the cornfield off toward the village.

"Well, I declare!" Then Nancy laughed her saving laugh and was herself again.

"Just suppose," she went on more calmly, "that he had said that thing to Miss Rose herself—what then?"

The supposes and the perhapses stretched far and wide in Nancy's thought. "And he believed I was Miss Rose at first and he said he would never hate me—even when he knew I was Nancy. That shows that he trusted me and he is such a shy, queer man but—he isn't 'middling.' I've learned that. Perhaps Miss Rose could make him into a great, strong man—perhaps he—needs her! What can I do?"

It was a very humble Nancy who asked that last question. A dear, sweet, tender Nancy who had a big girl-heart that wished happiness and joy for every one.

"Oh! this blessed summer! Just suppose we girls had all gone driving off to fashionable places instead of getting into each other's hearts

and souls? Oh! what—possibilities. And to think that bungling old *I* should have it in my power to—" Nancy smiled broadly—"to enrich the world by giving two of my bestest bests to it."

Then the girl on the rock grew very quiet and still. Her merry, quizzical face fell into serious lines—she was suddenly transformed into the Nancy that only God and a very, very few ever saw. Looking about shyly she dropped upon her knees and pressed her bowed head against the tree. Then she prayed her prayer. It was like an intimate appeal from a generous nature to a dear, wise friend.

"Please let me, all my life—help! Please use me, kind Father—it is so blessed to be used. Just let me be—one of your girls to carry the light you have entrusted to me, far and wide. Just as far and wide as I am able to go. And, dear Father, if I cannot go as far as another, or carry the light so high—let me be glad and never mind at all—if you give it to another to carry. Anyway, I can always light a little fire of love and service and health to 'warm the hearts of lonely mortals.'" The

words made Nancy think of other lines of the Sweet Camp Fire poem and she repeated them slowly and reverently:

"To warm the hearts of lonely mortals
Who stand without their open portals
The torch shall draw them to the fire
Higher, higher
By desire.

"Whoso shall stand by this hearth stone,
Flame-fanned,
Shall never, never stand alone."

Nancy rose to her feet and her wide eyes seemed to catch a glimpse of her vision. Strong, loving, and yearning for service, she saw *her* possibility.

"I could teach in that dear kindergarten if God wanted Miss Rose up here for Mr. Fleming. I could even take a hand in Meg's home —Mrs. Lee likes me. I could help there and give Father some hours, too. And I'm going to have a fire on my own hearth in my own sitting room every night this winter and I'm going to make it a place for lonely mortals—girls and boys who have only boarding house nooks to live in—to come to and get warm!



LET ME CARRY THE LIGHT
YOU HAVE ENTRUSTED TO ME

Mother will help me; and Bobbie, the darling, will be in his element. As many as I can wheedle in shall know that they shall never, never stand alone again if *I* can help it!"

The leaves above fairly quivered and a flock of birds, testing their wings for the long autumn flight, whirled overhead in an ecstasy of delight.

"I love to live!" Nancy murmured. "It is heavenly to feel the—the power in you!"

From afar came the call, "Wohelo!" Again and again it sounded. Could it be dinner time? Nancy looked at her watch. It was twelve o'clock. The vision on the mount had taken more time than one would think. But that is the way with visions.

"Come, Nancy! Pack your big ideas in your pocket and come along!" said the radiant Nancy to her old self. The hat was reclaimed; the long braids wound about the girlish head.

"Don't you get puffed up, Nancy Mowbray, alias Help. You're only going to *help*. Don't forget that. And remember another thing. The ones you help may often forget all about you and you mustn't mind that.

That's what all helpers are for and you must go on finding more folks to help right up to the end."

Down the hill went the plain, ordinary Nancy-girl, but, as she went, she sang her father's favorite hymn—she was beginning to love it, too.

"The mount for vision—but below
The paths of daily duty go,
And nobler life therein shall own
The pattern on the mountain shown."

And so Nancy came to the meadow singing clearly and with her head raised high—

"but below
The paths of daily duty go."

She had had a glimpse and Nancy was one to remember "the pattern on the mountain shown."

It was that very evening that she and Miss Rose had it out. They went for the mail together and there was a bit of waiting-time at the stile, for the postman was delayed.

"The shadows fall early," Miss Rose said as they sat side by side. "It will soon be time to go home, Nancy girl."

Nancy did not answer but her throat tightened.

"I've been thinking of that dear hymn your father sings so beautifully, Nan. You know the one about the mount for vision."

"Why, Miss Rose, this very day I was singing that as I crossed the meadow. How very odd! I wonder what made you think of it?"

"Oh! I was up on the hill opposite ours quite early. All at once it—the hymn came to me, for I seemed to see things so clearly. If you could only remember the vision as plainly as the paths of duty which are trodden."

Nancy was looking away from Miss Rose, but presently they began to sing together:

"And nobler life therein shall own
The pattern on the mountain shown."

The still beauty of the summer night seemed to press close about the two and hold them together. Miss Rose put out her hand and found Nancy's coming forward to meet hers.

"Nice Nancy!"

"Nice Hiatini!" Then:

"Miss Rose, suppose a very great and wonderful secret came to you that was meant for another, what should one do with it?"

"Pass it on, Nan, or give the real owner a chance to take it to the right person. I hope, my dear, you haven't been reading other people's letters or eavesdropping."

Miss Rose laughed. The idea of Nancy doing anything underhand was truly comical.

"I wish it had been anything as easy as that," Nancy said. "But to have any one plump right into you and bang a secret straight into your heart before you knew where you were—I tell you that's—fierce!"

"It certainly is." Miss Rose did not laugh now but she pressed Nancy's hand closer. "You make me think of my dear Aunt Patsy!" she said; "she was such a perfect old darling. To her came every one in the village with their secrets and hopes—why the little gray house was fairly bursting with them. Aunt Patsy used to say that she felt like a pickpocket. She really felt that in some way she *wrenched* people's secrets. She never did—folks just naturally came to her, I suppose. Living in the old home has made me think of Aunt Patsy more than I have in long years. I get homesick for her sometimes. I can see her now every time I shut my eyes. She used to

sit by the western window of the upper room —Meg's bedroom and mine. The same old chintz-covered rocker was there. Often I think I would give anything—almost anything, to kneel down by Aunt Patsy, put my head in her lap and tell her all about it. I have never had any one all my own, my very, unattached own, since Aunt Patsy died. I have you all and many dear friends and the blessed babies in the kindergarten, but oh! Nancy, every woman feels the need of owniest owns at times. Christmas and holidays you feel it. You'll always be a secret gatherer, Nancy dear. Every girl here feels it and it is a sacred thing. Sometimes you'll be tired and feel burdened, but nothing else in life is so beautiful as the privilege of—helping along!"

"Oh! Miss Rose," and then Nancy did one of her queer, erratic things. She jumped from the stile and stood in front of Miss Rose quite stiff and white. She looked like a frightened girl about to recite a piece and when she spoke she sounded so, too, the jumble for a few moments meant nothing at all to her audience of one.

"He thought I was you. It was the robe and—and his nearsightedness. He said—I can't remember what he said—it didn't amount to much but he said it like a sermon or prayer and then I made him reel by owning up and you know, Miss Rose, that when a timid person gets warmed up to doing a thing once, he may not be able to do it again and two lives might be wrecked and blasted and I *do* think every one should have a choice of kindergartens and parsonages and a world duty or a parish duty. There are things to do everywhere, gracious knows! and I didn't dare keep this to myself for when he said he didn't hate me I knew it was because he thought I'd have decency and justice enough to help him out! Thank heaven, that's done!"

Nancy wiped her brow and panted, but Miss Rose only stared at the pale, excited girl in silence.

"Miss Rose, why don't you say something? Of course you know this terrible thing was hurled at me when I had no idea it was coming. You see it had to come; it was aimed at you, but it hit me and there was nothing for me to do but pitch it on to you and you need

never think I'll refer to it again. I'm not very tactful, but you can rely upon me."

"Oh! Nancy, Nancy!" Somehow Miss Rose was in Nancy's strong young arms. She, who had been the unselfish guide of so many young things, was now the youngest of them all and Nancy seemed the oldest.

"There, there, dearie!" whispered Nancy. "I don't know whether you are laughing or crying, but anyway it's between us forever and forever."

"Oh! Nan, I'm—I'm doing both. I ought to be ashamed to be so silly. Why, what will you think of me? I'm thirty-eight, Nan, think of that! Thirty-eight and whatever will your families think of me?"

"Well, my family will think one thing!" Nancy's hand was smoothing the head upon her breast; "just one thing or I'll know the reason why! Gracious, it is no light and simple thing to—to be like your Aunt Patsy and me. Miss Rose, are you laughing *more* than you are crying? I don't want to pry, but tell me just that."

"Nancy—I'm—I'm about half and half."

"Any leaning to—one side or the other?"

"Oh! Nancy." And with that Miss Rose began to laugh helplessly and uncontrollably. "I believe you are the most precious, comical goose on earth."

And just then the postman came in sight, his big white horse clumping along the road as leisurely as if the mail were early instead of late.

But the subject of Nancy's secret was not referred to again. There were many letters and interesting looking packages and Miss Rose was her calm managing self once more. She did not even ask Nancy not to mention what lay between them. She took it for granted. But late that night, lying wakeful and restless upon her cot, Nancy thought to herself:

"Now I'm not aching to know things, no one can call me snoopy, but I'd just like to know a little more. This is going to be a Lady and the Tiger thing I suppose. But thank heaven! I've done my duty, my whole duty, and it nearly finished me.

"Now, Nancy Mowbray, shut your eyes, count slowly and conscientiously two hundred and—forget it!" A clock downstairs struck eleven.

"One hundred and ninety-nine—two hundred!"

Nancy sat up in bed and looked out at the white moonlight flooding the side yard.

"Now, mercy me!" she muttered, "do you think it's my duty to—set him right? Well, I declare! Why, I'm only seventeen and three quarters. She is thirty-eight, though you'd never think it! And he's older than that or I miss my guess. And what could I tell him anyway? Good gracious! have I got to settle this whole summer for folks I'd like to know? Can't I have any fun of my own?"

Then, because Nancy was tired and excited, she began to cry softly and pitifully, little knowing that Aunt Patsy Fay in that same little room used to do the same thing when the burdens and secrets had worn upon her a bit.

Presently Nancy got up and went to the stand by the window. On it lay her writing pad, fountain pen and candle. With close-set lips she knelt down, lighted the candle, and plunged in.

"Dear Mr. Fleming:

"All I can say is that it seemed to me she

laughed more than cried. It was all pretty muggled, but at least I *know* she laughed at last, but whether it was at you or me I couldn't say. It might be worth your finding out if you are willing to take a chance.

"Yours respectfully,

"NANCY MOWBRAY."

"There!" said Nancy, getting on her feet. "That's the last blessed thing I can or will do for them. I wouldn't take the chance if I were he, but that's not *my* affair."

Then Nancy went back to bed, turned and smoothed her pillow, pulled the old patchwork quilt over her and fell at once into the sweetest, deepest sleep.

The clock downstairs struck twelve and one! The moonlight came straight in Nancy's window now and lay over her narrow bed like a blessing. The girlish figure was still; the kind face pathetically young and peaceful. Then some one came into the room, and bending over the pillow, looked long and lovingly at the sleeping girl.

"Dear, dear Help! Have you shown me the way to my heart's desire? What *is* my heart's desire?"

Then as light as a touch of the midnight breeze, a kiss, as fond as Nancy's own mother could have given, fell on the placid brow.

"Dear, brave, loyal child!"

And then, in tiptoeing out of the room, Miss Rose placed her hand on the table to steady herself and knocked off a letter, enveloped and stamped—for Nancy never did things half way! The moonlight was so bright and clear that without realizing that she was reading the writing Miss Rose saw the address! For a moment her heart throbbed and beat wildly and she almost crushed the letter in her hand. But presently she laid it down and stepped from the room with bowed head.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW THEY LANDED MARGARET

MARGARET, Joy and Nancy, were in the kitchen. The day was crisp and fine and the three were getting up a company dinner.

"Just fancy the feelings of the Knights when Miss Rose bears down upon them with this sudden invitation. Sunday night tea they take for granted now and perhaps a dinner thrown in once a week if they're good, but since they've taken to supplying us with fish and Mr. Fleming deluges us with vegetables and fruit we have to get them to help us eat things up."

Nancy paused and took breath.

"I dare say they feel real flattered and conceited," Joy put in, hulling blackberries for a delectable pudding that Margaret was reading about from a cook book.

"Well, let the innocents think what they please. So long as they help wash dishes and continue the fish—we can stand it!" Nancy

was stringing beans airily and jauntily. "Just think, I used to cut the ends of beans and then strip them brutally up and down both sides. Now, thanks to Mrs. Allen, I pop off the ends—thusly! Then shred them up like a lady. It's quite artistic this way. What kind of fish was donated yesterday, Joy?"

"I—I think they said cod—or maybe it was whale. Anyway they caught it down at Beaver Dam. The boys went with Jim—what's his name? They got up at four o'clock. They always get up exactly at four o'clock when they go fishing with Jim. That's the critical hour, he says."

"You little idiot!" Nancy said pleasantly and frankly; "don't you know better than to think cod or whale is native to these waters?"

Margaret laughed as she tried to keep the ingredients of the pudding in her mind.

"Well, it doesn't matter," Joy returned good-naturedly; "there is an awful lot of it. About a half bushel I think and it's all cleaned, too. I'm thankful for that. There's something so cool and—and unresponsive about fish. I hate to handle them."

"Two generous cups of flour!" repeated Margaret.

"Nan, what would you say was a generous cup?"

"The dipper," said Nan, snipping her crisp beans.

"Mercy, Nan!"

"Well, you asked my opinion. If you want me to modify it I will say the cracked mug that is like the widow's cruse. No matter how much you drink, there's always something in the bottom."

"Silly, Nan! But what *is* a generous cup?"

There being no answer to this Margaret filled a coffee cup and added a little for good measure, then she said quietly as she poised the second cup full, "I had the oddest letter from Mother last night. She's actually contemplating giving up our big, old house and taking a flat. She says she can lease the house for a sum that will more than cover the expense of moving and the rent of a fair sized apartment."

"I see my noble parents' hands in this!" muttered Nancy, grimacing at Joy.

"What?" asked Joy who always wanted

hints issued with explanations. Nancy frowned darkly.

"But think of Mother and me and the children in a few rooms when we've always spread ourselves all over. I've often said that, pinched as we have sometimes been, we've always been able to get out of each other's way. Of course I will write and tell mother not to do it. She's thinking of economy, but I will take some pupils to help out, or tutor some youngsters. There are several hours a day that I can spare."

Joy looked imploringly at Nancy and Nancy glowered at Joy.

"What ails you two?" Margaret asked, weighing her sugar nicely.

"See here!" blurted out Nancy—"Don't you write that letter! Just when things are going nicely why do you want to spoil them? It isn't like you, Meg."

"I don't know what you mean." Margaret's voice was low and full of wonder. Nancy pulled the last string off the last crisp bean before she made reply, then she said:

"Meg, did you ever hear the story of the hunch-backed prince?"

"No."

"Well, there he was hunched-up and crippled, but with a great and splendid ambition to see everything and do big things. Along came a giant with an empty noddle but enormous height and mighty legs. When he heard and saw the prince, what does Mr. Giant do but put the dwarfed prince on his shoulders 'and now' he said, 'you can see farther than I ever could and I can carry you wherever you want to go!' Meg, you are the hunched-backed prince!"

"Thank you!" Margaret laughed and took the berries from Joy.

"And Joy and I are the silly-noddled giant —sort of Siamese twins giant."

"Thank *you!*" cried Joy, tossing her head. Nancy was off at full speed now.

"Oh! Meggie dear, don't you dare balk the most heavenly plan that ever was. I wanted to break this to you gently in a fine poetical way, but as usual, I am using a gun. Meg—it's this! Joy and I are stupids as you very well know. We'd disgrace any college we entered, but you—oh! Meg, we have learned all about your longing and we know what splendid

material you are and Joy and I—*really* Joy and I, with our own money are going to put you through until you become so wonderful and famous that you will carry us all into glory and renown. It's all fixed. All you've got to do is to—let us manage."

Margaret had dropped the iron spoon she held and sunk into the chair by the table. Her eyes looked big and frightened—she was gazing into her Promised Land like one half asleep. She could not understand—she could only look! After a minute she said faintly:

"Just for a moment I forgot—Mother and the children!"

"Meggie!" Joy was beside her, her arms about the tall, slim form. "It's the heavenliest thing girls were ever able to do. You must let us. We'll try and take your place and ease your mother and when you come out of college—just think!"

Margaret did think and it bowed her head upon her folded arms while sobs shook her body.

"You'll be famous some day," Nancy was saying soothingly; "you have no right to defraud yourself and us. It's only a loan, Meg.

I know how you feel, dear. It's our very own money, too, and we've got to sacrifice ourselves—think of that, Meg! *sacrifice ourselves!* If you fail us or flunk we'll take it out of you!"

"Oh, oh!" Margaret moaned: "I shall always worship you for the thought, girls, but—it is impossible!" With that she rose suddenly and by a wild gesture swept the dish of pudding off the table and onto the floor with a mushy crash that brought them all to their senses.

"Heavens!" shrieked Joy—"no dessert!"

"Sweep it out of the back door!" commanded Nancy with fine indifference; "we've got to settle this college question now and here. Margaret, do be sensible. We're only asking you to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. Think what it will mean for Joy and me to look at you and say 'we helped!' Just put yourself outside yourself and give yourself some good advice."

Margaret was very quiet again. Her face had the rapt, white look that came to it in hours of exaltation. She was thinking of Jim Nichols and her advice to him. How clearly she could see it for him! Why should she

deny herself the justice she meted out to others? And then in that still moment again the vision claimed her. Free to work and study—what might she not do? She felt all the ambition and strength of her past hopes rising within her—the hopes that she believed had died when her father left her. If she did not accept this wonderful offer she could do little for her loved ones at the best, but with an education and training—" The fair autumn scene outside the kitchen window glistened through the tears—the proudest, happiest tears—of Meg's young life. She turned to Nancy and Joy and stretched out her arms.

"To think you—thought of me in this way! How could you, you blesseds? What have I ever done to—win me this?"

Nancy had the pale girl in her arms, while Joy, leaning on the mop, with which she was discouragingly trying to clean the pudding from the floor, regarded them with soft, shining eyes.

"Now, Meggie," a suspicious quiver shook Nan's voice: "don't make me break down! Once I let myself go—there's no telling!

You *will* do it, dear old thing, won't you? You will go to college for Joy and me, won't you? You will study and be a dear, old grind, won't you, chummie? And no one must know but us—and our parents. It's a splendid adventure, that's what it is: Little daffy Joy and me rigging you out with an—an armor and sword and big, fine you striding ahead and winning the battles we never could have won! We will stand by the side of your triumphant passage, Meg, and—and root you for all we're worth!"

And now it was Joy who was crying undisguisedly and eloquently.

"Oh, oh!" she sobbed, swishing the mop with its sticky mass before her toward the door. "I never did a good thing before in my life! Isn't it heavenly? Oh! thank you, thank you, Meggie, for letting me find myself!"

"But—the children and mother!"

"Now, Margaret—leave them to us." Nancy was smoothing Meg's hair with that kindly touch of hers that one never forgot. "The apartment for a few years will do them good—draw them closer together! And by and by, why you will be able to run the big house again as a side issue!"



TO THINK YOU THOUGHT OF ME IN THIS WAY!
WHAT HAVE I EVER DONE TO — WIN ME THIS?

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever heard of!" Margaret drew sticky little Joy into the embrace. "And just you two girls!"

"It's the Camp Fire spirit," Joy panted from out Margaret's hug; "it's—just that."

"The beans," cried Nancy. "It's always beans at the psychological moment in this camp!"

"Take off the top ones!" commanded Margaret, her common-sense self at once, "don't mess the scorched bottom ones. There! fling them in this pot. Hark! Are the boys coming?"

Joy ran to the window.

"They are!" she said. "Off with your aprons, girls."

It was a rule of the camp that the housekeepers should be ready to welcome visitors at any time.

"My shoes are—a sight!" moaned Joy. "That pudding was the most extensive pudding. You go on, girls, I'll stay and fix the fish. Everything else is done."

By the time Joy had her nice fish browned and crisp the oncoming party, announced by Danny, was by the arbor.

"Living on the hill," murmured Joy to herself as she slipped upstairs to change her shoes, "has its advantages. You always see the foe advancing."

Joy's eyes were shining and her heart was as light as thistle down.

"My! how the goodness oozes through me," she whispered smiling to herself as she fanned her pretty cheeks—"this is living and no mistake."

The dinner was a great success and was accompanied by jokes and much laughter. Between courses there were snatches of song, too, for the unconventional meals were free but never disorderly. Miss Rose was a perfect chaperone.

"She refines, but does not confine," Jago once said, and that was about it.

Suddenly, when the lack of dessert was being apologized for, Jane Trevor remarked:

"Where's Mr. Fleming these golden days? He hasn't been around for nearly a week."

"He turns up all serenely every day at our shack!" Sporty replied, flinging the appreciative Danny a half slice of bread. "Rather too serenely, I should say. If he wasn't a

minister, I'd make a wager he'd got religious."

"Maybe he's in love!" suggested Joy blandly.

"Wouldn't it be great fun to see any one like him just plain in love? I've often wondered how ministers and undertakers ever happened to think of—"

At this Nancy brushed a glass of water from the table and the contents all trickled off into Joy's lap. She made a bound from her chair and managed to topple Sporty over. Sporty was balancing himself on the two back legs of his chair and the onslaught had taken him at an unguarded moment. Danny, frightened and amazed at the unlooked-for confusion, leaped at every one in turn, capering and yelping with excitement.

"Whew!" muttered Nancy in the general uproar, "and all because the village minister is off somewhere—instead of attending to his duty!"

When the party had turned to and cleared the débris away, the long afternoon stretched before them. While the sun lay warm and full upon the hilltop, the out-of-doors was beautiful, so they all went to the arbor.

Jago had his violin; Sporty had his flute. Jane and Sylvia had mandolins and the others sang—not very well, to be sure, but sweetly, though out of tune. Presently Jago lay down his violin—he really played so much better than the others that, as Sporty remarked, he was a reflection instead of an inspiration.

"I'll do a solo by and by," Jago promised with a good-natured laugh. Then he went over to Miss Rose and leaned against the post of the arbor near which she sat.

"I'm—going to do it!" he whispered. "Somehow your advice cleared the cobwebs and I'm going to take the chance. That, passing it on to some other fellow set it right. I'm going to do that."

Miss Rose looked at him vaguely.

"My advice?" she asked, "about what? And what are you contemplating, dear boy?"

So sincere and honest did Miss Rose look that Jago merely stared in surprise.

"Why, the night of the dance," he said wonderingly, "when I told you about Mr. Nilson's offer. Sporty is—immense!"

"You—you must have said it to some one

else," Miss Rose had a glimmer of light now; "those pilgrim robes were very—very tragically misleading. But I'm glad if any good thing has come to you. I'm sure whatever decision you've come to—is a wise one."

"Who was it—then?" Jim Nichols looked around on the company with calculating eye.

"Nancy Mowbray?" Miss Rose suggested. "Nancy seems to have caught a good many confidences that did not belong to her."

"It wasn't Nancy."

"Could it have been Sally Temple? The girl is a witch at mimicry."

Jago shook his head.

"Sally is a limb and no mistake," he said with a laugh, "but that wasn't Sally."

Then he looked at Margaret and he *knew*. For Margaret at that very moment was speaking to Goo in tones that might easily have been mistaken for Miss Rose's.

"Well, anyway, Miss Rose, I'd like to tell you all about it."

"And I'd love to hear."

So the story was repeated.

"It's only a business proposition," Jago ended joyfully.

"Mr. Nilson is a big man. He insists my plugging along with Sporty is worth all I'm getting; however, he is willing the amount of my expenses for the next four years shall constitute a fund—to be passed on."

"It's a great idea," Miss Rose's eyes were shining; "I wish—"

"What, Miss Rose?"

"That some such thing could be done for a dear girl of whom I know. Somehow those things come more naturally to a boy—I wonder why?"

Jago was very quiet, but his earnest eyes were fixed upon Margaret's face.

"Could she wait until—well, perhaps—I'll be through in two years. I'll do my best."

"I fear not, Jim. It's now or never. But she's such splendid material, if only some one were wise or kind enough to understand—some one with imagination and money."

And that night when all was still in the wigwams, Margaret crept from her own little white bed to Miss Rose's and knelt down beside it.

"Hiatini," she whispered so softly that Miss Rose thought it was part of her dream; "Hiatini, I've got to tell you!"

Then Miss Rose awoke and sat up.

"I'm—going—to—college!"

And now Miss Rose thought that Margaret was dreaming.

"Dear child!" she said, "wake up!"

"Oh! I'm quite, quite awake. I haven't been able to sleep at all—the joy has flooded me with wonder and I cannot waste time in sleeping."

"What do you mean, Margaret?"

"It's come true! All the longing and desire—my heart's desire. It just came to me—from heaven."

"Come, Margaret, dear, speak *down* to me, child."

"To think I can never even tell you, dear Miss Rose. You'll only have to go on guessing and guessing, but no matter how magnificent your guesses are, they will not be half as glorious as the real thing. But this I can tell you—if you hadn't planned this summer it seems to me the world would have come to an end. College, Miss Rose! And by and by a career with good things for mother and the children. It seems as if everything had been turned to shining gold."

"Now, Margaret, get to bed. You are shaking with cold."

"No—only gladness, dear!"

"You are talking in your dreams, Meggie."

"Yes—in my dream!"

"Trot back, little girl."

So Margaret pattered back and was soon asleep; but Miss Rose lay upon her pillow and pondered.

"Not Sylvia's Grandfather," she thought; "nor Judge Conly. Who can it be who has opened the gate for the most precious little girl?"

But never once did Miss Rose guess the real ones who had lovingly, fumblingly and successfully touched the latch that was to set free the soul of Margaret and give it wings with which to reach its desire.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PATCHWORK GHOST

In another week Camp Brave Pine was to be broken up; the wigwams deserted, the last fire extinguished—for the summer! "For the summer!" became a term to conjure with. When young eyes grew sad and tender mouths pathetic at the thought of separation some cheery voice would cry "for *this* summer!" and smiles returned. Nevertheless there was not one who did not sit apart at times and shed tears of regret as she *remembered* the sweet weeks together and the blessed companionship that meant so much, would always mean so much in the years on ahead.

"We must think up one great and splendid jollification," Nancy said to Jane. "Something that will outdo anything we have yet done. A most magnificent ceremonial that will include every one. Of course we can *begin* with only our members, but a little later

have every one else come up to the hill for a good time. Let us have it two nights before we go away—that will give us a day and night to rest up before our trip home."

Jane nodded her head gayly.

"I'm rather glad I'm going back with you for a few weeks," she said. "Shopping, packing and hugging you all around will fill the time and in November—" Jane clasped her hands ecstatically—"in November the house on the hill will be ready and mother and I will have a country winter from start to finish. Nan, mother has gained fifteen pounds in relief and anticipation, she says. Isn't it sublime?"

The two were sitting in the arbor wrapped up in thick white sweaters for the September day at full noon was tingling and crisp.

"I tell you, Janey, New York City will suffer a great loss when you leave it!" Nan tried to joke, but her serious eyes belied her. "All the leading journals should have headline notices of the event.

" 'Departure of Miss Jane Trevor and her Mother. Miss Trevor, late private secretary

of Judge Conly, has taken her parent and gone to the White Mountains to make her permanent home. We mourn our loss! May our loss be their gain. R. I. P.' and all the other comforting things when every one knows there will be no comfort. Think of those dear lunches we had together, Jane. When we looked first down the list price and picked out the cheapest and then solemnly swore that was the thing we were perishing for!"

Jane laughed.

"And the suppers—the Sunday night suppers, when the dear hungry boys dropped in and we made toast and het things up, as Mercy would say, on the gas range. I shall miss it all horribly, Nan. I own up to that but instead—" and here Jane's eyes looked lovingly into Nan's—"Mother and I will have each other—without fear! and then the beauty and the knowledge that we can make a home, a truly home, upstairs-and-downstairs home with wood fires instead of asbestos rugs set endwise against the wall! And we'll call so loud to you all, you dear things, that I can see the railroads issuing reduced rates for separated chums."

"Jane, you are developing a keen and ready wit."

"Nan!" Jane turned about practically: "what has become of Mr. Fleming?"

"Sh!" said Nan looking suddenly around; "Miss Rose is up in her room in that everlasting rocker of hers—the one that was Miss Patsy Fay's. Miss Rose says she feels as if her Aunt Patsy's arms and love were about her when she sits in that chair. She's going to take it back to the city with her—for comfort, she says."

"Why does Miss Rose seem to need so much comfort just now?" Jane went on. "I've had my eye on her. Do you think we've been too much for her? She's a bit—tired acting!"

And then Nancy edged nearer while keeping her eye on the upper window over the porch behind which, swaying gently, sat Miss Rose in her Aunt Patsy's old rocking chair.

"It's—it's Mr. Fleming!" whispered Nancy into the astonished ear of Jane Trevor. "Mr. Fleming and—a great misunderstanding!"

"Heavens!" Jane was properly impressed. Then Nancy rushed on easing her mind by burdening Jane's.

"I found it out; I was plunged into the secret the night of the pilgrim dance; he thought I was Miss Rose. I! Just fancy such stupidity. And he—well, he didn't say much, but he meant much and—his *tones!* Oh, Janey—those thrilling tones! Of course I had to flounder on after that. I told him to stop talking. I scared him off and made myself known and he said he would never hate me, which, under the circumstances, I think was quite broad-minded of him. Nevertheless, I felt myself the master of their fates—it seemed up to me no matter whether I approved or not. I'd prefer kindergartens and us girls myself—but there's no accounting for tastes. Well, I took Miss Rose first and nearly reduced her to pulp."

"Oh! Nan! the poor dear thing! And you are so—so overwhelming when you let yourself go!"

Jane clasped her hands tragically.

"Oh! I was tact itself," Nancy spoke up on the defensive. "I took her in my arms and it was all quite touching, but there was an awful doubt in my mind as to whether she was laughing or crying most. Finally I decided

she was laughing most. Then I felt it was my plain, righteous duty to let Mr. Fleming know. No one else would or could, so I wrote him a brief, business-like note by the moonlight in my wigwam one night more than a week ago —and that seems to be the end of the matter. I've heard of people in love, Jane Trevor, but the real thing is—is—disgustingly stupid!"

"Oh, oh, Nan!" That was all Jane could say, but she said it over and over again until it got on Nancy's nerves.

"Don't be a prig, Jane Trevor, or a parrot. What do you think is the matter?"

"Oh, oh, Nan! How could the poor man come up here and face Miss Rose with your terrible meddling the only interpretation?"

"My terrible meddling! Well, I like that, Jane Trevor! I consider that I handled the whole affair with delicacy and courage—for one of my years and inexperience."

"Oh, oh, Nan! Why, it will take some great and overpowering thing to right this. Fire, flood or tragic accident. Dear old Nan! You are a blessed joke but a dismal failure as a Fairy God-mother."

"Umph!" muttered Nancy and drew herself up proudly. "We'll change the subject, Miss Trevor."

"Nan!"

"We'll speak now of the arrangements for our big flare-out. You know that Glory Hole under the attic stairs?"

"Yes;" Jane replied timidly; "where we keep our odds and ends."

"Well, what do you think I found there the other day? It was in a box under a pile of old newspapers and magazines. A dress and a queer little bonnet and silk cape. Awfully cute and odd and they fit me! The night of the entertainment I'm going to wear them instead of my ceremonial dress. You must help me. Just when the fire is ready to light—I'll walk in. Don't you remember how, when we first came up here, we used to say the people out of whose dresses the patch work quilts were made, might take to walking about? Well! one of them will walk. The dress I found is like that blue-green patch in Miss Rose's quilt. The changeable silk, you know, that Margaret loves."

"It will be great sport;" Jane entered in-

to the idea joyously. "I wonder how that box ever escaped us—we've all gone through the Glory Hole like fine tooth combs."

"You probably thought it an empty box."

"Well, anyway, it will be fun."

"And after we've had our fun," Nancy continued, "we'll all get into our pilgrim togs and have the thing I wrote. Come, we'll tell Miss Rose now for she must learn her part. We'll invite everybody up to that end of the evening and have refreshments. Each one of us will make something to show off how we've improved under Mrs. Allen. And—oh! Janey, we'll invite Mr. Fleming and see what will happen."

So off they ran to confide in Miss Rose.

But Fate took a hand in the game and set the big celebration a day ahead. The invitations were out for a "Ceremonial" at seven, sharp, September 20th. These invitations were by word of mouth and only to the Camp Fire girls. Other invitations—on picture postals—were issued to the others. The Town Club, which now proudly boasted ten paid members! Silas and Mercy, the Widow Thorne and Mr. Fleming. The postals had

been sent to the girls by Judge Conly. They were Camp Fire postals and Margaret had colored them beautifully so they were very realistic and charming. The boys of the Round Table, too, had been honored and were making all sorts of preparations to add their share to the hilarity of the occasion.

Then on the 19th the unexpected occurred.

They were going to have a rehearsal in the living room of Camp Brave Pine. A cheerful fire sparkled and snapped on the hearth and Hiatini, in her pilgrim robe, sat on a little raised platform that Silas had evolved from a cracker box, and several of the other pilgrims were grouped about repeating their lines.

"Where's Help and Wap?" asked the Owl of the Scribbler from her gray cowl.

The Owl counted the long-robed figures three times to make sure and then shook her head dolefully. The Owl was low in her spirits for, as the time drew near for the closing of the camp, life seemed drear and tasteless. Not even the promised visit during the winter, for her and the Scribbler, had power to lift the Owl's gloom.

"It's many an empty day between their go-

ing and that visit!" mourned she. "Besides, things might happen."

"Having Singing Cricket up to the farm on the ledge, will help," the Scribbler had comforted, and that was comfort indeed.

"Hiatini, Help and Wap are missing," called the Owl and just at that moment a little flying pilgrim dashed into the room with a face as white as the frost that had lain that morning on the dear summer grass.

"Miss Rose!" gasped the pilgrim, running toward the platform with outstretched hands, "one of those old patch-work ghosts is upstairs. I saw her walk out of the Glory Hole with a candle!"

A solid mass of gray pilgrims was around the speaker at this and Miss Rose came down from her throne and took the trembling Wap in her arms.

"Of course this is all nonsense, my dear little girl," she said, patting the small clinging hands.

"No, Miss Rose, it is really and truly as I say. She had a greeny-bluey dress of silk and a little black cape and a tiny bonnet and she had a—candle! She looked at me and—then went back into the Glory Hole."

A palpitating stillness filled the room. Joy's description of the patch-work ghost was so pathetically like Miss Rose's memory of her dear, old Aunt Patsy that for a moment a creeping fear held her dumb.

"Oh!" groaned the Scribbler and at that every one jumped and cried "ooh!" in terrified tones.

"This will never do!" said Miss Rose sternly.

"Let us go upstairs—where's Nancy?"

And at that they all looked blankly at each other.

"Where's Nancy?"

The color came back into Joy's face and the Owl snickered normally and wholesomely. And just at that instant in walked the patch-work ghost in her quaint make-up, her face filled with a greater horror than Joy's had known! She sank down upon the nearest chair and in a hollow, awesome tone, said, "I've set the house a-fire! Candle! Glory Hole!"

With that Nancy-the-patch-work-ghost tumbled on to the floor and lay quite, quite still!

To say that excitement prevailed would be

to speak far too mildly. The Owl and the Scribbler gave a whoop, that, for a moment, chilled the blood of every one.

"Attend to Nancy!" commanded Miss Rose and ran for the stairs. Jane Trevor took charge of the prostrate ghost and gave "first aid" in the practical way the Camp Fire instruction had made possible. In five minutes Nancy was on her feet and taking a hand in the work and hurry.

The candle had indeed ignited some papers and clothing in the Glory Hole closet and a greedy, mischievous tongue of flame had eaten its way through the roof by the time Nancy had regained her senses. Miss Rose knew the little gray house was well built and seasoned, but she also knew that unless help came soon, even the sturdy frame would succumb. She worked and the girls worked and the Owl was dispatched to arouse the Corners.

Meanwhile the Knights on their small porch were having what Sporty called a "Chin-chin."

Jago was holding forth on the glorious future and the joys of the passing summer. Goo was breaking in now and then, when he saw an opening, with a plan he had for "writ-

ing the summer up," having it published in leaflet form and getting it out for Christmas gifts—"all hands getting one."

Woe was more cheerful than usual for that day he had won his parents' consent to travel abroad for a year before he settled down to "grind through the 'Varsity.' "

Woe always referred to Cornell as if it were the only Hall of Learning in existence.

Sporty, full length on the floor of the porch, had Danny across his breast "for," as he said, "warmth and comfort."

Suddenly, Danny sprang up, thereby nearly crushing the life out of his master, and gave an alarming yelp.

"Shut up!" commanded Goo cheerfully; "if you want to bay at the moon, go to the rear."

But Danny preferred his present position and, raising his head again, emitted a terrifying howl.

"What did the brute have for supper?" Woe asked getting upon his feet and frowning.

"Leavings," Jago answered.

"Goo was cook. That accounts," Woe patted Danny's uplifted head; "poor doggie, suffering creature—I feel for you!"

Again Danny howled and ran toward the road.

"What ails him?" And now Sporty arose and followed his faithful Danny. "Fellows!" he shouted from the gateway, "the Camp's on fire! It's always fire of some sort up there!"

Sure enough, from that viewpoint the bright red flames could be plainly seen.

"Come!" That was all, but four big fellows and one excited dog were on the way to Camp Brave Pine! Never had they gone so quickly as they went then. Sometimes it was Jago ahead, sometimes another, but Danny was always leading the first man!

The pilgrims were dancing about the little house like veritable Indians. They were all doing what they could to save furniture and clothing. White, but quiet, Miss Rose issued her commands and directed her girls.

"It's all my fault!" wailed Nancy as the Knights rushed upon the scene; "I did it! I did it!"

"Well, I wouldn't mention it," confided Sporty seeking to steady the excited girl, "it's a good fire all right, but it's not to your credit."

"Here!" called Jago from the side of the

house, "if we can haul this end of the roof off we may save the rest."

No one had thought of that, but now every one was ready to help.

Uncle Silas was on hand with ropes and a hastily constructed tackle and as the roof over the Glory Hole closet was grappled, the fire seemed to brighten and spread. The village people, roused by Mary, were coming on the scene and every one offering advice and solace at once.

Suddenly Miss Rose whispered to Margaret, "I am going in to get—Aunt Patsy's rocker! It is perfectly safe yet. I must have the chair. Stand here, Margaret, and wait for me."

"No! no, Miss Rose! Please!"

"Meggie—it is perfectly safe."

Then Margaret, panic-stricken and helpless, stood alone. Oh! how they shouted and screamed—all the people! How the dogs, led by Danny, backed and darted underfoot. Mrs. Thorne was crying, Mercy was scolding and poor Margaret stood alone and waited through minutes that seemed like hours.

"The smoke! the smoke!" called Goo prancing on the porch with a pail of water; "the house is filled with smoke."

"Where's Miss Rose?" It was Nancy screaming in Margaret's ear. "Where is she?"

Then another voice broke in. A deep, awed voice, "Where *is* she?"

Margaret turned and faced Mr. Fleming.

"She's gone upstairs for the—old rocker!" she answered like one in a dream.

"The house is full of smoke!" Again Goo poured a pail of water vaguely into the hallway. But Mr. Fleming gave a leap right into the smoke! With bowed head they saw him go up the stairway, two steps at a time. Nancy's face was strained and haggard. She, Goo and Margaret watched the open door!

"It's conquered! the fires out!"

Was that a dream?

"Look out! there comes the last piece of roof! Now, fellows, pour on water; pour on water! The house is all right unless a new start springs up."

"See! see!" Every one in front of the house looked up. Announced by a flying rocker that was hurled from an upper window, two figures came out upon the roof of the little porch.

"Miss Rose! Mr. Fleming!"

The minister, grim and smoke-stained, held Miss Rose by the hand. Her face was white and terrified and she followed like a little child.

Jane rushed to Nancy and flung her arms around her:

"It had to be—fire!" she whispered tragically.

"And I reckon—" Nancy returned dramatically—"that the kindergarten has got to take the back seat!"

At nine o'clock the danger was past. Only part of the roof, and some damage by smoke inside, was the result, except the gutting of the Glory Hole!

Nancy, still in her quaint dress and bonnet on the side of her head, looked upon the scene with grateful eyes.

"A few days' job!" Uncle Silas said. "The house needed a new roof anyway. These young 'uns have about raised it."

"And Lands' knows!" Mercy added, "a little more elbow grease at Fall cleaning will sweeten up everything and take off stains. I was allowing to Silas yesterday that it would take about a week after you all went, to set things in order. As far as I can see there

ain't no great damage done. We've all had another performance, that's about it!"

"We can make things safe for to-night," the widow Thorne announced, "and then divide you folks up and take you in."

In the hurry of preparation Miss Rose came close to Nancy.

"It's—the parsonage by and by, dear," she whispered. And nonsensical Nancy leaned on the brave little shoulder and wept as if her heart would break.

"I reckon the pine and me will watch the rest of the night through," announced Uncle Silas. "We'll camp out along with you, Uncle," Sporty spoke up. And the others cheered him to the echo.

Then the little procession wended its way down the hill and across the meadow. The moon came out from behind a bank of clouds and the wind sprang up too late to do any damage. In the division Sylvia found herself allotted to Sally for the night's entertainment and Nancy went with Mary Temple. Miss Rose bided with Mercy and in a sudden rush of hospitality the widow Thorne took Joy, Jane and Margaret.

After the excitement was over Sylvia and Sally had a sacred conference.

"I'm going to show you my notebook!" Sally said, bringing the precious thing to Sylvia's bedside. "See! I meant to use you all in a novel some day. 'Tain't only city folks that can find characters in the country."

Sylvia had an awakening that night. By the light of the kerosene lamp when Pa and Ma Temple thought they were asleep, Sylvia read how she and her friends had appeared to the nimble-witted Sally. It was all very comical and diverting, but Sylvia looked humble and grim.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"This," Sally replied, tiptoeing to the little stove across the room and putting the book inside. "And this!" she struck a match—and "this!" There was a "whoof!" as the draught fanned the flame.

"Oh, you brave thing," Sylvia cried.

"And now the fire has wiped out everything mean." Sally came back to the bedside.

"This summer will always seem like a big, purifying thing that burned up all the mean-

ness and hate and—and showed the way to—splendid doings!"

"You—do say such lovely things, Sally."

"I'm going to—to try and live them," Sally returned. "And now good-night, Sylvia. I don't see how I could ever have felt as I once did about you."

"Nor I, about you, Sally. But then I'm a different girl."

"And so am I."

And back in Mercy's small, trim guest chamber Miss Rose knelt before the little window looking westward.

"It still stands," she whispered, "under the Brave Pine. And if my poor, distracting Nancy had not lighted the most precious fire I might never have known my soul's desire. Oh! my girls! my girls! We are close to each other and always will be and Camp Brave Pine will welcome us all for many and many a summer—God willing. We none of us—not one of us—will ever stand alone again!"

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